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www.thehillstimes.in

THE HILLS TIMES

PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM GUWAHATI & DIPHU

Voice of the hills people

Vol .No. III Issue No. 150

RNI-ASSENG/2023/86488

GUWAHATI, THURSDAY, AUGUST 6, 2026

PAGES 12

PRICE ₹ 8

J-K, Ladakh witnessed wide-ranging transformation since Article 370 abrogation: PM



NEW DELHI, Aug 5: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said since the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019, the lives of people in Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh have witnessed wide-ranging transformation, with expansion of infrastructure and growth in opportunities in education, health-care, entrepreneurship and sports sectors.

On the seventh anniversary of the abrogation of Article 370, Modi said the Centre remains committed to the development of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh and to ensuring that every citizen has the opportunity to "dream big, achieve and contribute" to the making of a Viksit Bharat.

He said infrastructure in the two Union Territories has expanded, while opportunities in areas such as education, health-care, entrepreneurship and sports have grown.

Be it women or marginalised communities, those who were denied their basic constitutional rights for decades have been empowered thanks to the full application of the Constitution of India, Modi added.

In a post on X, the prime minister said, "Seven years ago, on this day, Articles 370 and 35(A) became history, marking a decisive new chapter in the journey

of Jammu and Kashmir as well as Ladakh."

On August 5, 2019, the BJP-led Centre abrogated Article 370, which gave special status to Jammu and Kashmir, and the erstwhile state was bifurcated into two union territories -- Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh.

"We reaffirm our commitment to the progress of Jammu and Kashmir as well as Ladakh and to ensure that every citizen has the opportunity to dream big, achieve and contribute to the making of a Viksit Bharat," he added.

PM Modi said "August 5 this year assumes even greater significance as this is the year the nation commemorates the 125th birth anniversary of Syama Prasad Mookerjee".

"His lifelong commitment to national unity continues to inspire generations. What he envisioned decades ago found historic fulfilment on 5th August 2019," he said.

Mookerjee was the founder of Bharatiya Jana Sangh, the precursor of ruling Bharatiya Janata Party. He had fought for full integration of Jammu and Kashmir with the rest of India by scrapping Article 370.

Born on July 6, 1901, Mookerjee died under detention on June 23, 1953 in Srinagar. (PTI)

Assam flood toll rises to 89 ● Fresh rain threatens fresh inundation

Nadda visits Sivasagar, assures full support

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Aug 5: The flood situation in Assam remained critical on Wednesday as overnight rainfall threatened fresh inundation in low-lying areas, while the death toll rose to 89 and more than 1.22 lakh people continued to be affected across five districts.

Union Health Minister JP Nadda visited the flood-ravaged areas of Sivasagar district during the day and assured full support from the Centre for relief, rehabilitation and compensation to the affected families.

According to the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA), the Dhansiri river at Numaligarh in Golaghat district continued to flow in a "severe flood situation", prompting authorities to advise people to stay away from the river.

The latest ASDMA flood bulletin reported two more flood-re-



lated deaths in the last 24 hours—one each in Sivasagar and Golaghat districts—taking this year's death toll to 89.

More than 1.22 lakh people remained affected, with Sivasagar being the worst-hit district where

nearly 60,000 people have been impacted, followed by Charaideo with over 31,000 affected and Jorhat with nearly 20,000.

The administration is operating 55 relief camps and relief distribution centres across four districts,

providing shelter to 17,857 displaced people.

Medical and veterinary teams, along with other agencies, continued relief and rescue operations in the affected areas.

The floods have submerged 15,342.92 hectares of agricultural land and affected 26,575 domestic animals and poultry.

Extensive damage has also been reported to embankments, roads, houses, schools and other public infrastructure.

Meanwhile, Nadda, accompanied by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, visited Nepalkhuti village along the Assam-Nagaland border in Sivasagar district, one of the worst-affected areas since the floods struck on July 19.

"I have visited the flood-hit Nepalkhuti area. Along with CM Sarma, I have witnessed the scale of devastation. The damage is so huge that it will take time (for nor-

malcy to return)," Nadda told reporters after interacting with the affected families.

After interacting with affected families, the Union Minister said the scale of devastation was enormous and restoring normalcy would take time.

"I want to assure you on behalf of Prime Minister Narendra Modi that there will be no shortcoming from the Indian government. Whether it is financial assistance, rehabilitation, compensation or support for property losses, everything will be provided," Nadda said.

He said the Prime Minister had deputed him to assess the ground situation and that he had discussed the impact of the floods in detail with the Chief Minister.

Nadda and Sarma travelled to the flood-hit area in a tractor-trailer as roads remained inaccessible due to thick (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

4,052 stranded Indian seafarers safely repatriated during West Asia crisis: Sonowal

NEW DELHI, Aug 5: As many as 4,052 stranded Indian seafarers have been safely repatriated during the geopolitical crisis in West Asia, Union Shipping Minister Sarbananda Sonowal said on Wednesday.

Sonowal chaired a comprehensive review meeting with senior officials of Ports, Shipping and Waterways on Wednesday to assess the safety and security of Indian seafarers amid the evolving geopolitical crisis in West Asia and beyond.

"The DGCOMM Centre (MMDAC) is operating round-the-clock to monitor distress alerts and coordinate rescue efforts."

"During the ongoing crisis: 4,052 stranded Indian seafarers have been safely repatriated and



16,448 calls and 40,594 emails handled by our emergency response channels," he said in a post on X.

The minister said the Director

General Maritime Administration (DGMA) is also providing repatriation support, medical assistance, counselling and continuous engagement with affected families.

Rs 10 lakh immediate financial assistance is being provided to the next of kin of deceased seafarers under the SWFS Special High-Risk Area Scheme, he added.

Sonowal said Indian seafarers are global key workers, and the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government stands firmly with them and their families.

"The safety of our maritime heroes remains our paramount priority and we are leaving no stone unturned to ensure their welfare," he said.

An Indian-flagged merchant vessel has been hit by a projectile near Yemeni waters on Tuesday, causing the vessel to capsize and sink.

In a social media post, Sonowal had said (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Nadda visits landslide-hit Mon, inspects affected areas, promises support

KOHIMA, Aug 5: Union Health Minister JP Nadda on Wednesday visited landslide and flash flood-affected areas in Mon district of Nagaland and inspected the extent of the devastation, met affected families and promised of all possible support from the Centre for relief, rehabilitation and restoration.

Nadda, accompanied by Assam Health and Family Welfare Minister Ashok Singhal and Rajya Sabha MP Phangnon Konyak, inspected the landslide-hit Defence Colony and adjoining affected areas in Techa Ward before interacting with victims and civil society representatives at the Konyak Union Office in Mon.

Expressing solidarity with the affected families, the Union minister described the disaster as "very disheartening and painful" and comforted them, saying they were not alone during this difficult time.

"I saw the situation and understood the hardships the people were facing after the calamity. The Centre will leave no stone unturned to support relief and restoration efforts," he said, adding that a central team would also visit the district to assist in relief measures.

Nadda further conveyed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's message of condolences and solidarity to the bereaved families, stating that he had been entrusted by the PM to personally assess the situation and extend the Centre's support.

He also appreciated the relief initiatives undertaken by the district administration, led by Deputy Commissioner Wennynei Konyak, along with the Konyak Union, Konyak Students' Union, Konyak Nyupuh Sheko Khong and other organisations in operating emergency relief camps.

He commended the efforts of the rescue teams comprising the district administration, police, SDRF, civil society organisations and (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Worker from Assam killed in Arunachal's landslide

ITANAGAR, Aug 5: A man from Assam was killed and another injured in a landslide at a hydroelectric power project site in Arunachal Pradesh's Kurung Kumey district, an official said on Wednesday.

According to the Kurung Kumey District Information and Public Relations Officer, the incident occurred around 3 pm on Tuesday when debris and boulders rolled down a hill slope onto the Parsi Parlo Hydro Power project site due to the landslide.

The deceased worker was identified as Nabin Doley, a resident of Dhemaji district of neighbouring Assam.

Doley died on the spot while another worker was extricated from the debris and taken to a nearby medical facility for emergency treatment.

The identity of the injured is yet to be ascertained, the district official said.

The project management team has initiated a detailed assessment of the site, and further administrative procedures are underway, he said. (PTI)

RS passes bill to raise Supreme Court judges' strength to 37; govt cites pendency concerns

NEW DELHI, Aug 5: The Rajya Sabha on Wednesday passed a bill to increase the number of judges of the Supreme Court from the present 33 to 37 (excluding the Chief Justice) with a voice vote with Union Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal asserting that the government is committed to independence of the judiciary.

The Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment Bill, 2026, was passed by a voice vote after a brief discussion in the Upper House, while Opposition members staged a walkout.

The bill, which will replace an ordinance, has already been approved by the Lok Sabha on August 3. Being a Money Bill, the Upper House returned it to the Lok Sabha.

Replying to the debate, Meghwal, who is the Minister of State for Law and Justice, said the increase in the sanctioned strength is part of the government's judicial reforms aimed at improving access to justice and reducing the backlog

of cases.

He said the judiciary has witnessed a steady rise in case filings, necessitating an expansion in judicial capacity.

"A structural shift is needed to be adopted in the Supreme Court, where a need is felt to establish at least one permanent constitutional bench and two or three dedicated three-judge benches," he said.

Meghwal said questions are raised on the government for going through the ordinance route to expand the number of judges at the apex court. Replying to that, the minister said the Chief Justice, through a letter, informed the Prime Minister on May 11 about the rise in number of daily case filings.

"He (CJ) said there is a gap of 10,000 cases per year. He said that 75,410 cases were filed and a fresh 46,988 cases were instituted. It has become necessary to have a higher daily disposal rate at the admission stage. This will only be possible when the number of judges in the Supreme Court increases," said

Meghwal.

CJI had also mentioned that when the constitutional benches are established, for example, the case of Sabarimala is being heard by a nine-judge bench, the number of judges is reduced in the regular benches.

"Due to the establishment of the constitutional benches, the number of judges is reduced in the regular cases," he said adding, "the long sitting of larger benches leads to reduction in the strength of regular benches, which contributes to pendency. Therefore, increasing the number of judges has become necessary."

Meghwal said over the years, governments have taken steps to increase the number of judges. When the Supreme Court started functioning in 1950 it had eight judges, including the Chief Justice. Its strength has been increased from time to time in line with the growing workload.

He also said the recent increase in (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

ISRO furnished 33 flood inundation maps to Assam this monsoon: Jitendra Singh



NEW DELHI, Aug 5: The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) provided 33 flood inundation maps and value-added products to the Assam State Disaster Management Authority until July 28 this monsoon season, Union Minister Jitendra Singh said on Wednesday.

Flood inundation maps provide near real-time and historical data on flood-prone areas, which could help in planning or regulating developmental activities in flood plains, and carry out rescue and relief operations.

In a written reply in the Lok Sabha, the minister stated that the

maps and products were provided using the Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) and optical satellite data through the National Database for Emergency Management (NDEM).

While SAR data contains all-weather and all-time images, optical data comprises high-resolution images during sunlight and clear skies.

Providing flood inundation maps is among the several initiatives undertaken by ISRO to furnish district-level details of flood information and improve the timeliness of rescue and relief operations in Assam, Singh said.

Its other initiatives include the use of globally available satellite data, development of semi-automated sensor-specific data, processing algorithms and flood-mapping workflows, and generating flood reports at the district level, he said.

"The spatial flood inundation data is published in the NDEM portal for visualisation at district or sub-district level. High-resolution satellite (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Higher education should teach 'how to think, not what to think': Mizoram CM



GUWAHATI, Aug 5: Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma on Wednesday urged students to use higher education not merely to earn degrees but to become compassionate, responsible and visionary leaders capable of addressing the complex challenges of a rapidly changing world.

Encouraging students to look beyond classrooms and examinations, he said the true purpose of higher education is to teach individuals "how to think, not what to think".

Addressing the postgraduate students at the Deekshambh-2026 student induction programme at an

educational institution here, he said universities have a responsibility that extends far beyond imparting academic knowledge.

"They must nurture scientific temper, critical thinking, moral courage and a commitment to public service among young people," Lalduhoma said.

Expressing happiness over the presence of students from Mizoram at RGU, the chief minister said they serve as ambassadors of their culture while embracing the traditions of another state, thereby strengthening bonds among the northeastern states and reinforcing the ideals of national integration.

He described education as one of the strongest bridges connecting people across geographical boundaries and appreciated the varsity's decision to dedicate its forthcoming convocation to the theme of Mizoram. Lalduhoma also expressed condolences to the families of those who lost their lives in the recent devastating floods in Assam and conveyed solidarity with the affected communities.

Speaking on the occasion, RGU chancellor A K Pansari highlighted the university's growing international outlook and said that students from 28 countries are currently pursuing higher education at RGU, reflecting its emergence as a diverse and inclusive global learning destination. (PTI)

Bokshi had its world premiere at the International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR) in 2025

Multilingual feature 'Bokshi' to hit screens

GUWAHATI, Aug 5: Multilingual folk-horror feature film 'Bokshi', directed by Bhargav Saikia, is set for an India theatrical release on October 9, following a successful run at leading international film festivals, its makers said on Wednesday.

Produced by Lorien Motion Pictures, Bokshi had its world premiere at the International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR) in 2025, according to a statement issued by the production house.

The film also holds the distinction of being the only Indian feature showcased at the 2025 editions of major genre festivals, including Sitges International Fantastic Film Festival in Spain, Neuchatel International Fantastic Film Festival in Switzerland and SXSW Sydney in Australia, it added.

Speaking on the theatrical release, producer-director Bhargav



Saikia said, "We are thrilled to bring Bokshi to our home audiences after an exciting 2025 festival tour. Crafted specifically for young audiences, Bokshi is a horror film made to be experienced on

the big screen."

Penned by debutant screenwriter Harsh Vaibhav, the film follows Anahita, a troubled teenager whose school trek to a remote prehistoric site unravels unsettling connec-

tions to an ancient legend. As myth and reality converge, she is drawn into a haunting mystery that forces her to confront the unknown.

"Bokshi is a fearless story about power, belief and the narratives that shape us. We can't wait for audiences to experience its world in theatres this October," said Vaibhav, who also serves as the film's executive producer.

The cast includes Prasanna Bisht, Mansi Multani and Sidharth Shaw in pivotal roles, with Shernaz Patel voicing the titular character.

A multilingual film, Bokshi features Hindi, English, Nepali and Boksir -- a fully developed fictional language created exclusively for the film by renowned Dutch linguist Jan van Steenberghe.

"With this, Bokshi becomes only the second Indian feature after 'Baahubali' to feature a constructed (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

RBI keeps rates unchanged, retains neutral stance

MUMBAI, Aug 5: The Reserve Bank of India on Wednesday maintained a status quo on its benchmark policy rate for the fourth consecutive meeting and retained the stance as "neutral", with Governor Sanjay Malhotra saying the next move of the central bank on interest rates, as well as policy stance, will be data dependent.

The prime focus of the central bank is to align the headline inflation with its target of 4 per cent over the medium term, Malhotra said at the post-policy press conference.

The six-member Monetary Policy Committee unanimously voted to keep the policy repo rate unchanged at 5.25 per cent, and opted to wait for more clarity on whether higher energy costs in the wake of the West Asia crisis feed into broader inflationary pressures.

Announcing the policy decision, Malhotra said the headline inflation is expected to rise in the near term and peak in the third quarter of 2026-27, largely due to food and fuel prices, before moderating.

Inflation pressures have not become broad-based, with core inflation, excluding precious metals, remaining benign, he added.

Malhotra reiterated the RBI's "resolute" commitment to bringing inflation in line with its target while awaiting greater clarity on the inflation outlook.

The central bank marginally raised the GDP forecast for the current fiscal to 6.7 per cent while slightly lowering the inflation projection to 5 per cent.

In the June policy, it had projected the GDP growth for FY27 at 6.6 per cent and inflation at 5.1



per cent.

Although generalised inflation pressures continue to remain modest so far, the risks of higher food, fuel and other input prices translating into a broad-based increase in inflation persist, it said.

The central bank said despite heightened global uncertainty due to the West Asia conflict and trade tensions, India's GDP growth remained resilient, supported by robust domestic demand, manufacturing and services activity and strong exports.

It, however, warned that the outlook remains uncertain due to risks from the southwest monsoon, El Nino conditions, geopolitical developments and global trade policies.

"Global economic conditions and sentiments continue to remain hostage to the rapidly oscillating developments, both in scale and intensity, of the West Asia conflict.

While these have impacted the domestic growth-inflation outlook adversely, the stronger macroeconomic fundamentals of the Indian economy are helping navigate this global shock resolutely," Malhotra said.

This, he said, presents an opportunity to accelerate measures to enhance our resilience to withstand such shocks. "We shall continue to implement policies that further fortify our economy. Whether it is facilitating sustainable growth or promoting consumer protection; whether it is preserving stability of prices, the financial system or the currency, we will do whatever it takes to ensure the same."

System liquidity remained in surplus, and the RBI said it would continue to conduct two-way liquidity operations to ensure adequate liquidity in the banking system and align the weighted average call rate with the policy

repo rate.

Regarding the Foreign Currency Non-Resident (Bank) deposit scheme, Malhotra said the flows have been "robust", and the RBI expects healthy movement of funds going forward till the closure of the limited-period scheme.

Asked if the central bank is looking to close the scheme prematurely, given that there is a cost which the RBI is committed to bear for the fund inflows, Malhotra said there is no such proposal as of now.

When pointed out that the rupee has not appreciated as intended despite the high flows from foreign shores, the governor said a further strengthening in the rupee is possible if geopolitical tensions de-escalate.

It will be the RBI's endeavour that the trajectory for the rupee remains orderly, he added.

The RBI also said it is targeting to launch long-lasting polymer currency notes at the beginning of the next financial year.

The polymer currency notes have lasted for over 30 years in some jurisdictions and will come in handy, especially for the lower denomination notes which have high velocity, Malhotra said at the press conference.

"We are targeting that they are in circulation, if everything goes as per plan, in the beginning of the next financial year," he added.

To improve transparency and consumer protection, the central bank proposed harmonising and standardising the regulatory framework governing interest rates on advances across all regulated entities. (PTI)

Nissan TEKTON debuts in Assam at Binod Nissan showroom

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 5: Nissan's flagship premium C-SUV, the all-new Nissan TEKTON, made its Assam debut on Wednesday at Binod Nissan, Guwahati, marking another step in the company's strategy to strengthen its presence in the Indian market.

Inspired by the iconic Nissan Patrol, the TEKTON combines bold SUV styling with premium interiors, advanced technology and high-performance turbocharged engines. The SUV is offered with Turbo T160 and Turbo T280 petrol powertrains. The T280 engine develops up to 163 PS of power and 280 Nm of torque and is available with both six-speed manual and dual-clutch automatic (DCT) transmission options.

Speaking on the occasion, Arun Agarwal, Director of Binod Nissan, Guwahati, said the TEKTON brings together bold design, premium comfort, advanced technology and strong performance, adding that customers in Assam would have the opportunity to experience the SUV through test drives at the dealership.

The TEKTON features a premium tri-tone cabin equipped with dual digital displays, ventilated powered seats, Google built-in with Google Maps, Google

Assistant and access to over 200 applications.

It also offers more than 55 connected features through the MyNISSAN App.

Designed for practicality, the SUV provides 212 mm ground clearance and a 700-litre boot, along with premium features such as a panoramic sunroof, 360-degree parking assist, powered tailgate, wireless charging and dual-zone climate control.

On the safety front, the TEKTON comes with six airbags as standard, over 40 safety features and more than 17 Advanced Driver Assistance Systems (ADAS), including Adaptive Cruise Control, Autonomous Emergency Braking, Lane Keep Assist, Blind Spot Warning and Traffic Sign Recognition.

Manufactured at Nissan's Chennai plant under its "One Car, One World" philosophy, the TEKTON has been developed for both domestic and international markets. The introductory price of the Nissan TEKTON starts at ₹10.49 lakh (ex-showroom) for the T160 MT variant. Bookings are now open, while showroom display and test-drive facilities are available at Binod Nissan, NH-27, Lalung Gaon Road, Betkuchi, Guwahati.

Made-in-India surgical robot enables landmark India-Colombia telesurgery

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 5: In a major milestone for India's indigenous medical technology, SS Innovations International has successfully facilitated a robotic telesurgery between Hospital Internacional de Colombia and Mohak Bariatrics and Robotics, Indore, spanning an approximate 22,000-km fibre network.

The procedure, performed using the Made-in-India SSI Mantra Surgical Robotic System, demonstrated the capability of advanced robotic technology to enable expert surgeons to conduct complex operations across continents while expanding access to specialised healthcare.

The robotic sleeve gastrectomy was remotely performed from

Colombia by Dr Sudhir Srivastava, Founder, Chairman and CEO of SS Innovations International, along with Dr Victor Raúl Castillo Mantilla and Dr Jonathan Caceres Prada. The patient-side surgical team in Indore was led by bariatric surgeon Dr Mohit Bhandari, assisted by Dr Abhishek Tiwari.

The surgery was completed with a network latency of approximately 275-285 milliseconds (round-trip time), highlighting the precision, stability and reliability of the SSI Mantra platform over ultra-long distances. The company said the achievement marks another step towards decentralising specialised surgical expertise by enabling surgeons to remotely support procedures in distant locations, thereby improving access to advanced minimally invasive surgeries, strengthening surgical mentoring and reducing the need for patients to travel long distances. Unlike many imported robotic systems, the SSI Mantra has been designed and manufactured in India with a focus on affordability and accessibility. The company said its lower acquisition and operating costs make robotic surgery more accessible to hospitals in tier-II and tier-III cities as well as in international markets. Commenting on the achievement, Dr Sudhir Srivastava said the successful telesurgery demonstrated that geography need no longer be a barrier to quality surgical care.

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Nadda visits Sivasagar

layers of mud and silt nearly three weeks after the deluge. Describing the extent of destruction, Nadda said the river flowing from Nagaland's Mon district had devastated village after village, causing extensive loss of life and property.

"The river flowing down from Mon district (in Nagaland) has devastated village after village. There has been extensive loss of lives and property," the Union minister said. "We will hold a review meeting in the evening to discuss the way forward. CM Sarma did everything possible to provide immediate relief to the affected people, and the relief operations are continuing on a large scale," Nadda said.

He said that while the Assam government was deploying all its resources to tackle the crisis, the Centre would extend every possible assistance. (With inputs from PTI)

4,052 stranded Indian

India strongly condemns this "unprovoked attack" on the defenceless mechanised sailing vessel, MSV Faize Noore Oliya. "The safety of our people is our supreme priority & I am relieved to inform that ALL 14 seafarers (including 13 Indians) have been safely rescued by the Yemeni Coast Guard and brought to the Port of Mokha," he had said. (PTI)

Nadda visits landslide

volunteers. According to a statement issued by the Konyak Union, Nadda later held a meeting with the district administration and Konyak civil society organisations at the Konyak Union Office, where he also met family members of those who lost their lives in the disaster.

During the meeting, the Konyak Union presented photographs and video footage documenting the widespread destruction caused by the landslides and flash floods across Mon district.

Remendo Shitio, assistant manager (Response and Communication), Nagaland State Disaster Management Authority (NSDMA), who made a presentation on the post-disaster interim assessment of Mon, said incessant rainfall on July 19-20 triggered landslides and flash floods across the district, resulting in loss of lives, extensive damage to homes, severe agricultural losses and complete disruption of major road connectivity.

He said that the Mon district headquarters recorded 83.95 mm of rainfall on July 19, while cumulative rainfall between July 19 and 31 stood at 341 mm.

Deputy Commissioner Wennyel Konyak briefed the Union minister on the disaster situation, stating that continuous heavy rainfall had caused widespread flooding and landslides, severely damaging roads, bridges and public infrastructure. Several villages experienced temporary disruption in road connectivity, while Defence Colony and adjoining areas were among the worst affected. Many houses were damaged, families displaced, and power and water supply disrupted in some locations.

He said relief camps and temporary shelters had been established wherever required, with food grains, drinking water, medicines and other essential commodities being distributed to affected families.

The deputy commissioner informed the gathering that Nagaland ministers who were scheduled to accompany the Union minister could not travel to Mon as continuous rainfall in Kohima prevented the helicopter from taking off due to adverse weather and operational constraints. (PTI)

ISRO furnished 33

data is used to assess flood damage at the district level, subject to the availability of cloud-free satellite data," the minister said. (PTI)

RS passes bill

number of judges has already enabled the formation of dedicated benches to hear the oldest civil and criminal matters, freeing them from routine miscellaneous work and helping expedite disposal of long-pending cases.

Meghwal said though disposing of prolonged cases is the exclusive domain of the judiciary, according to Article 21 of the Constitution, the central government is obliged to facilitate, and this amendment is in this direction. "As soon as per the order notification of the Supreme Court, four such specific benches were formed which will exclusively hear the old legacy civil and criminal matters."

Addressing concerns over representation of women in the higher judiciary, Meghwal said the country is likely to see its first woman Chief Justice of India soon and noted that four high courts, those of Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Meghalaya and Patna, had women chief justices. Over judicial infrastructure, he said the government has sanctioned ₹ 795.53 crore for expansion of the Supreme Court complex, including construction of 28 courtrooms, nine Constitution court halls and 42 judges' chambers.

"The judiciary is an independent organ of governance, and the government is fully committed to judicial independence. Our effort is to provide judges a conducive environment so that justice reaches citizens in the best possible manner," Meghwal said.

On appointments to the higher judiciary, he said this involves a continuous consultation and collaboration process between the judiciary and the executive. He said appointments to the Supreme Court and High Courts are made under Articles 124 and 217 of the Constitution, respectively, and are governed by the Memorandum of Procedure evolved through judicial pronouncements.

Referring to demands for a southern bench of the Supreme Court, Meghwal said the apex court has so far not agreed to the proposal, though consultations on the issue continue. Over the district courts, he said filling the vacant position in the subordinate court is in the domain of the high court and the state government concerned. He said more than 64 lakh cases are pending in high courts and about 4.98 crore cases in district courts across the country, underlining the need for sustained reforms and capacity enhancement in the judicial system.

However, he also added that in 2014, the judge to population ratio was 16.11 per million population, which has now increased to 22.33 per million. The minister also highlighted the government's focus on digital transformation of the justice delivery system. He said over ₹ 7,210 crore has been allocated for the e-Courts project to strengthen technology-driven judicial services. (PTI)

Multilingual feature 'Bokshi'

language," the statement claimed. Shot in the dense forests of Sikkim, the film distinguishes itself through its commitment to practical effects instead of heavy VFX or CGI, lending it an unsettling authenticity and psychological dread.

The technical team includes cinematography by A Vasanth and Siddharth Sivasankaran, editing by Himanshu Saikia, sound design by Dhiman Karmakar and music by Advait Nemlekar. (PTI)

Meta apologises over PM Modi post removal

NEW DELHI, Aug 5: Instagram and WhatsApp-owner Meta Platforms Chief Executive Mark Zuckerberg apologised for the temporary removal of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Facebook post, as company executives acknowledged failures involving child sexual abuse content and deepfakes and admitted that "a lot of money was paid for boosting a certain type of content", government sources said on Wednesday.

Sources speaking after the US technology giant's global team led by its Global Affairs head Joel Kaplan met Information Technology Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said Meta, which owns Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, admitted to lapses in the operation of the company's platforms.

Before meeting Vaishnaw, Kaplan, who served in the administration of George W Bush, including as White House Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy before joining Meta (then Facebook) in 2011, and his team held a separate discussion with IT Secretary S Krishnan.

The meetings followed the government summoning the company's global leadership over the brief removal of Modi's Facebook post last month, which Meta had blamed on a technical glitch.

While Meta officials did not offer any comments on the meeting, government sources said the Meta team apologised and expressed regret over the incident and over other content moderation failures.

The sources said company executives also admitted that "a lot of money was paid for boosting a certain type of content". They did not elaborate.

Government sources said the Centre told Meta that it could not claim the status of a neutral "intermediary" under India's Information Technology Act because the company's algorithms actively curate, recommend and determine which users receive content, rather than merely hosting third-party material.

On that basis, the government argued that Meta would not be entitled to the safe harbour protections available to intermediaries, which shield platforms from liability for user-generated content subject to compliance with the law.

The sources said the issue was conveyed to the company's global leadership as part of the government's broader push for greater platform accountability.

The government also questioned Meta over child sexual abuse material, deepfakes, safeguards for verified and prominent accounts, algorithmic bias and compliance with Indian law.

Meta admitted that a lot of illegal content was promoted, and paid promotions were carried out for specific audiences, government sources said, adding that Meta will be called again.

Meta was in the crosshairs of the government after temporarily restricting the Prime Minister's July 23 Facebook post, in which he addressed Indian youth and promised stringent action against paper leaks.

Modi first posted the selfie video on Instagram. The video was later shared on Facebook.

Meta later restored the post, attributing its removal to an error by AI-powered automated content filters, and apologised. (PTI)

ICICI Prudential simplifies flood claim process for Assam families

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 5: ICICI Prudential Life Insurance has simplified its claims settlement process for nominees and beneficiaries of policyholders affected by the recent floods in Assam, aiming to expedite financial assistance to bereaved families. The company said it has relaxed documentation requirements for death claims arising from the disaster.

In place of a death certificate, nominees may submit any official record or evidence issued by government authorities, hospitals or the police, or documents relating to compensation paid by the Central or State Government confirming the policyholder's death. Claimants are also required to submit the nominee's bank account details with IFSC code or a cancelled cheque, along with valid KYC documents, including PAN or Form 97, a recent photograph and any officially accepted identity proof such as Aadhaar, passport, driving licence, voter ID, NREGA job card or a letter issued by the National Population Register. To assist affected families, the insurer has activated a dedicated 24x7 toll-free ClaimCare helpline (1800-2660). Claims can also be initiated through the company's website, mobile application, email, or by sending an SMS with the policy number. Sarang Gokhale, Chief - Underwriting & Retail Claims, ICICI Prudential Life Insurance, said the company stood in solidarity with families affected by the floods and was committed to settling all eligible death claims quickly on the basis of the simplified documentation process.

ASSAM POWER GENERATION CORPORATION LIMITED
Registered Office: Bijulee Bhawan, Paltanbazar, Guwahati-781 001, Assam
CIN: U40101AS2003SGC007239
Tel.No.: 0361-2739502, Fax No.03612739546/22
E-mail: khonsing.teron@apgcl.org, Website: www.apgcl.org

SHORT TENDER NOTICE NO. APGCL/KLHEP/GM/E-79/Part-III/2026/14 Dated:05/08/2026

"Supply of 1 (one) no. of Ambulance (Force Trax Cruiser Ambulance) on monthly hiring basis for the use of O/o the General Manager, KLHEP, APGCL, Lengery, West Karbi Anglong".

Vehicle Model No: Force Trax Cruiser Ambulance: CR AMB PS AC(6+P) (AIS:125) BS6.2(B-TYP) ABS)

Financial Involvement: Rs. 40,000.00 (Rupees Forty Thousand) only per month on hired basis.

Tender Paper Issue (Start Date) : From 10:00 hrs. of 06-08-2026
Tender Paper Issue (Closing Date) : Up to 13:00 hrs. of 27-08-2026
Tender receiving : Up to 12:00 hrs. of 28-08-2026
Tender Opening : At 15:00 hrs. on 28-08-2026

Detailed tender documents may be obtained from the O/o the General Manager, KLHEP, APGCL, Lengery, West Karbi Anglong, Assam during working hours (9:30 AM to 5:00 PM). The tender inviting authority reserves the right to accept or reject any bid/tender and to cancel the bidding process and reject all bids at any time prior to contract award.

Sd/-
General Manager, KLHEP, APGCL

AFFIDAVIT
I, Lakshi Prasad Laskar, DOB-25-11-1983, S/O Maneswar Laskar, a resident of Borkala, P.O.Borkala, P.S. Sadar, district Nagaon (Assam), do solemnly affirm and declare before Nagaon Court on 4th April, 2026, that my actual and correct name is "Lakshi Prasad Laskar" which is recorded in all relevant documents including in my Aadhaar card, vide No-2681-1862-4529 and also in my PAN Card, vide No-BENPL6976C, but my name has been recorded in my PLI Policy, vide Policy No-RAS-HQ-EA-101059, as "Babu Laskar" instead of "Lakshi Prasad Laskar". As a matter of fact Lakshi Prasad Laskar and Babu Laskar are the names of one and single person i.e. myself.

AFFIDAVIT
I, Saharul Islam Choudhury age 26 years S/O Lukman Uddin Choudhury, a resident of Harital Basti, P.O. & P.S. Diphu, district, Karbi Anglong, Assam, Pin Code -782460, solemnly affirm and declare at Diphu Judicial Court on 05th August, 2026 that my actual name is "Saharul Islam Choudhury and I am known and identified by this name. Where as in some of my documents, my name has been wrongly recorded as Saharul Islam Choudhury instead of Saharul Islam Choudhury.

Both the names Saharul Islam Choudhury and Saharul Islam Choudhury is of single person i.e. myself but not different person.

NAME CORRECTION
My father actual name is BABUL MIAH which is correctly recorded in all relevant document. But my father name has been wrongly been recorded as BABUL MIAH in the jamabandi covered by Dag No.121,124 and 157, Patna No.176 lot no - 5 revenue village - Bhurakata under Mankachar revenue circle. My father name has been recorded as BABUL MIAH instead of BABUL MIAH. BABUL MIAH and BABUL MIAH is the one and same person having single identity which is correct to the best my knowledge and belief. BIPASHA PARVIN D/O - LATE BABUL MIAH.

NAME CHANGE
I have changed my name from Mohammed Sokat Ali to Shakat Ali by swearing a Executive Magistrate Affidavit at Sirimanta Sankardevnagar, Hojai (Assam) Shakat Ali Vill-Borhahar, PO-Borhahar,PS-Murajhar, Dist-Hojai (Assam)

Lok Sewa Puraskar conferred on dedicated public servants

Assam observes Lok Kalyan Divas

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 5: Lok Kalyan Divas was observed across Assam on Wednesday to commemorate the 76th death anniversary of Bharat Ratna Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi, with district administrations paying tribute to the state's first Chief Minister and honouring government employees for exemplary public service under the Lok Sewa Puraskar.

According to our Tezpur correspondent, the district administration organised a programme at Conference Hall-II of the District Commissioner's Office in Tezpur.

Tezpur MLA Prithiraj Rava, who attended as the chief guest, highlighted Bordoloi's role in safeguarding Assam's territorial integrity and described him as one of the architects of modern Assam.

Additional District Commissioner Tridib Roy urged government employees to uphold Bordoloi's ideals of public service, while Chief Executive Officer of Sonitpur Zilla Parishad Jayanta Kumar Bora stressed the importance of citizen-friendly governance based on fairness, transparency and responsiveness.

The District Level Lok Sewa Puraskar 2026 was presented to Jibon Bora, Physical Instructor in the Office of the District



Sports Officer, Sonitpur, in recognition of his dedicated service.

Accepting the award, Bora thanked the State Government and appreciated its initiatives to promote grassroots sports and strengthen the state's sporting ecosystem.

The programme was attended by Nagaar Co-District Commissioner Manash Kumar Saikia, Barchalla Co-District Commissioner Rajeeb Sonowal, Tezpur Development Authority Chairperson Biswa Dev Bhattacharjee, assistant com-

missioners, heads of departments and other officials.

Our Silchar correspondent adds: The district-level observance was held at the District Commissioner's Office in Silchar.

Addressing the gathering, Udharbond MLA Rajdeep Goala said that had Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi not firmly opposed attempts to detach Assam from India, the entire Northeast would not have remained an integral part of the country.

He described Bordoloi as a visionary leader whose efforts safeguarded Assam's future and noted that he was conferred the Bharat Ratna in 1999.

The Lok Sewa Award was presented to Sujaybir Deb, Junior District Administrative Assistant in the Office of the District Commissioner and Shantilata Topno, Staff Nurse in the Office of the Joint Director of Health Services, Cachar.

The award, instituted by the Assam Government for non-gazetted employees, carries a cash prize of ₹25,000, a citation and a one-year extension of service after retirement.

District Commissioner Rahul Kumar Gupta said the award recognises the often-overlooked contributions of subordinate government employees and urged officials to continue serving the public with honesty, efficiency and compassion.

Additional District Commissioner Monojyoti Kutum said the recognition encourages excellence in public service, while Assistant Commissioner Diksha Sarkar described Lok Kalyan Divas as an occasion to reaffirm the ideals of selfless public service and transparent governance.

The programme also featured floral

tributes to Bordoloi's portrait and the screening of a documentary on his life and contribution to Assam and the nation.

Our Haflong correspondent adds: The programme was attended by Dima Hasao Autonomous Council Executive Member Donpainon Thaosen, Executive Member Probita Johori, District Commissioner Gayatri Devidas Hyalinge and other officials.

After the ceremonial lighting of the lamp and floral tributes to Bordoloi, Thaosen called upon government employees to perform their duties with honesty and dedication for the welfare of the people and the development of the district.

District Commissioner Hyalinge emphasised the importance of dedication and efficiency in public service, while Assistant Commissioner Junali Devi Singh highlighted the State Government's initiative to recognise outstanding public servants through the Lok Sewa Puraskar.

On the occasion, the Lok Sewa Puraskar 2026 was conferred on Jatan Kemprai, a Multi-Tasking Staff (MTS) in the District Commissioner's office, in recognition of his loyalty, efficiency and exemplary public service.

Illegal cough syrup worth ₹30 lakh seized; two arrested

HT Correspondent

JAGIROAD, Aug 5: Jagiroad Police seized 2,747 bottles of illegal cough syrup valued at around ₹30 lakh during a special operation conducted on Tuesday night and arrested two alleged smugglers.

The arrested persons have been identified as Deepak Rajbanshi of Bihata Chariali in Kamrup district and Satyajit Das of Nagaon.

Police also seized an Innova (registration number AS 01 BT 3399) bearing a 'Govt. of Assam' nameplate, which was allegedly being used for transporting the contraband.

A departmental investigation has been initiated under the supervision of the Superintendent of Police (Crime Branch), Morigaon, to ascertain the source and intended destination of the seized consignment and to identify others involved in the smuggling network.

Dima Hasao gears up for National Deworming Day with orientation meeting

HT Correspondent

HAFLONG, Aug 5: A Convergence-cum-Orientation Meeting on National Deworming Day (NDD) FY 2026 was held at the Conference Hall of the Joint Director of Health Services, Haflong, under the aegis of the District Health Society, National Health Mission (NHM), Dima Hasao, to review preparations for the programme.

The meeting was chaired by Joint Director of Health Services Dr Sarsing Rongpi.

During the programme, District Immunization Officer Dr Marina L Chansang delivered a presentation on the transmission of intestinal worm infections and highlighted the importance of the National Deworming Day initiative.

She said worm infections, caused mainly by poor sanitation, contaminated food and water, inadequate hand hygiene and walking barefoot, can lead to malnutrition, anaemia, stunted growth and reduced learning ability among children.

She stressed that regular deworming, handwashing with soap, access to safe drinking water, improved sanitation and the use of footwear are key preventive measures.

She also outlined the implementation strategy and the responsibilities of the departments involved.

The Social Welfare Department and the Education Department were requested to provide updated beneficiary data, including children aged 3-6 years enrolled in Anganwadi Centres and those aged 5-19 years studying in government and government-aided schools, to facilitate smooth implementation of the programme.

Asam Sahitya Sabha seeks probe into Upper Assam floods

Literary body submits memorandums to Centre, Assam and Nagaland governments



HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Aug 5: The Asom Sahitya Sabha has demanded an independent probe into the causes of the devastating floods that affected Sivasagar, Charaideo and Jorhat districts and urged the findings to be made public.

The demand was made through resolutions adopted at an executive committee meeting chaired by Sabha President Dr Basanta Kumar Goswami.

The literary body has submitted separate memorandums to the Central Government, the Assam Government and the Nagaland Government.

In the memorandums, the Sabha called for the constitution of an independent judicial, scientific and inter-state inquiry commission to investigate the causes of the

floods, including the role of the Dikhow Hydroelectric Project, embankments in Upper Assam, coal mining, hill cutting and other contributing factors.

General Secretary Debajit Borah said the Sabha has also sought the formation of an Assam-Nagaland Joint River Basin Management Authority to oversee dam operations, river management, early warning systems and real-time data sharing between the two states.

The organisation further urged the governments to undertake scientific reconstruction and strengthening of damaged embankments, roads, bridges, drainage systems and other public infrastructure in the affected districts.

Among its other demands, the Sabha sought government jobs for

one eligible member from each family that lost a member in the floods, one-time rehabilitation assistance, continued search operations for missing persons, a special economic rehabilitation package, permanent housing and livelihood support for affected families, farmers, traders, journalists and medical professionals.

It also called for compensation for livestock losses, veterinary support, crop compensation, interest-free agricultural loans, improved seeds and farm equipment, besides special assistance for the revival of agriculture, tea gardens, fisheries and the rural economy.

The Sabha stressed the need to strengthen disaster management by constructing permanent flood shelters, upgrading early warning systems, enhancing rescue infrastructure and ensuring safe drinking water in flood-prone areas.

It also sought loan waivers and exemption from land revenue for flood-affected farmers.

The literary body further appealed to the Government of India to declare Assam's recurring flood crisis a "National Problem" and implement a science-based permanent flood management system, backed by a special economic package for the long-term rehabilitation and reconstruction of affected areas.

KKHSOU hosts awareness programme on energy conservation, renewable energy



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 5: Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU) organised an awareness programme on "Energy Conservation and Renewable Energy: Advancing Environmental Sustainability through Bioenergy" at its Khanapara campus in collaboration with the Centre for Internal Quality Assurance (CIQA).

The programme was inaugurated by Dr Parag Dutta, Director, CIQA, who highlighted the importance of promoting green technologies and creating public awareness on energy conservation

and renewable energy to address growing environmental challenges.

The keynote address was delivered by Prof Rupam Katiki of the Department of Energy, Tezpur University, who stressed the need to transition from fossil fuels to sustainable energy systems.

He noted that nearly 80 per cent of the world's primary energy still comes from fossil fuels, while coal contributes about 55 per cent of India's electricity generation.

Prof Katiki highlighted the environmental impacts of fossil fuel dependence, including climate

change, air, water pollution and land degradation.

He also pointed out that India generates around 750 million metric tonnes of biomass annually, with an estimated surplus of 230 million metric tonnes, offering significant potential for bioenergy production.

He further explained the role of bioenergy and biochar in converting biomass into clean energy and value-added products through pyrolysis technology, describing them as important tools for environmental protection, the circular economy and achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Delivering the presidential address, Prof Nripendra Narayan Sarma of KKHSOU emphasised the scientific utilisation of agricultural residues, municipal solid waste and solar energy to strengthen India's renewable energy sector.

He said effective biomass management and the adoption of green technologies are essential for sustainable development.

The programme concluded with a vote of thanks by Dr Antara Mahanta Barua, while Dr Kabita Baruah of the Discipline of Physics conducted the proceedings.

Elderly man dies amid artificial flooding in Jagiroad

HT Correspondent

JAGIROAD, Aug 5: An elderly man died after artificial flooding inundated large parts of Jagiroad town following heavy rainfall on Tuesday night. The deceased has been identified as Ramesh Bardoloi (78) of Markankuchi village under Jagiroad Police Station.

He was a former employee of the Assam Spun Silk Mill in Jagiroad and a former master athlete.

According to reports, Bardoloi had been bedridden for a prolonged period.

The heavy downpour led to severe waterlogging across the town, with residents attributing the recurring problem to blocked natural drainage channels and the absence of a scientific drainage system.

Locals also alleged that extensive hill cutting and felling of trees in recent years have aggravated the situation, resulting in artificial flooding during heavy rainfall.

They warned that unless corrective measures are taken, the problem is likely to worsen in the coming years.

NFR revises train services as Simaluguri flooding disrupts operations

Several trains cancelled, diverted and short-terminated amid restoration work

HT Correspondent

GUWAHATI, Aug 5: Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has announced fresh cancellations, diversions and partial cancellations of several trains due to flooding and heavy rainfall at Simaluguri and adjoining areas in Sivasagar district under the Tinsukia Division.

According to NFR, the revised arrangements have been made to ensure passenger safety while restoration work continues in the flood-affected section.

The Dibrugarh-New Delhi Rajdhani Express (12423) and Dibrugarh-New Delhi Rajdhani Express (20503),

scheduled to commence their journeys on August 6, will be diverted via North Lakhimpur-Rangapara North-Rangiyga-Guwahati-New Bongaigaon.

Several other long-distance trains, including the Avadh Assam Express (15909), Vivek Express (22504) and Kamrup Express (15959), have also been diverted on revised routes. In the reverse direction, trains such as the Rajdhani Express (12424 and 20504), Avadh Assam Express (15910) and SMVT Bengaluru-New Tinsukia Express (22501) will operate via alternative routes.

The Nagaland Express (15669/15670) will be short-terminated

and short-originated at Mariani, with services between Mariani and Dibrugarh remaining cancelled.

NFR has also cancelled several passenger and intercity services, including the Jorhat Town-Tinsukia Passenger, Tinsukia-Lumding DEMU, Guwahati-Ledo Intercity Express, Ledo-Guwahati Intercity Express, Ledo-Rangiya Passenger and Simaluguri-Dibrugarh Passenger on the affected dates.

NFR said engineering teams and senior railway officials are working round the clock to restore the flood-affected tracks and resume normal train operations at the earliest.

GEM girls brighten Kokrajhar with eco-themed wall murals

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Aug 5: The participants of NTPC Bongaigaon's Girl Empowerment Mission (GEM) 2026 completed a week-long wall mural painting project, transforming township boundary walls into colourful artworks carrying the message of a cleaner and greener Kokrajhar.

Despite intermittent rain, the girls spent seven days creating murals under the guidance of local artist Heman Narzary and his team. The paintings highlighted themes of environmental conservation, cleanliness and sustainable living.

According to NTPC, the initiative was designed not only to promote artistic expression but also to instil values of teamwork, perseverance, creativity and environmental responsibility among the participants.

The organisation said the project demonstrated how small collective efforts can contribute to spreading awareness about environmental protection and inspire positive change within the community.

NTPC Bongaigaon concludes Girl Empowerment Mission 2026

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Aug 5: NTPC Bongaigaon concluded its four-week Girl Empowerment Mission (GEM) 2026 with a cultural programme on July 31 and formal de-registration of participants on August 1 at its Salakati Township, marking the successful completion of a month-long residential initiative for 50 girls from nearby communities.

Aligned with the Government of India's 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' initiative, the programme concluded in the presence of Executive Director and Head of Project Arnab Maitra, who said GEM reflects NTPC's commitment to creating opportunities for young girls and helping them realise their potential.

He highlighted that the residential programme combined academics, creative activities, sports, workshops and experiential learning to build confidence, leadership and independence among participants.

Earlier, Head of HR Amit Kumar Asthana welcomed the



gathering and outlined the objectives of the programme.

He acknowledged the contributions of the Bardvi Shikla Ladies Club, GEM committee members, faculty, coordinators and various departments of NTPC Bongaigaon in organising the initiative.

The concluding cultural programme featured performances including a skit on athlete Hima Das, Assamese Bihu, Bodo folk dance, fusion dance, mime, yoga demon-

strations, group songs and a finale celebrating women's empowerment. An exhibition of artworks and handicrafts created by the participants during the programme was also organised.

On August 1, participants were formally handed over to their parents and guardians.

Certificates and framed photographs commemorating their participation were presented in the presence of senior NTPC officials,

union representatives, faculty members and coordinators from Tanvi Consultancy Limited.

Held from July 3 to July 31, GEM 2026 offered lessons in English, Hindi, Mathematics, Science and vernacular languages, along with computer literacy, life skills, yoga, self-defence, theatre, sports, art and craft, clay modelling and pottery painting.

Participants also attended sessions on fire safety, health and hygiene, environmental awareness and public speaking, besides taking part in educational and exposure visits.

This year's edition marked the expansion of the programme at NTPC Bongaigaon, with the intake increasing from 40 to 50 girls.

Since launching GEM in 2022, the station has empowered 210 girls from neighbouring communities.

Introduced by NTPC in 2018, the Girl Empowerment Mission has reached more than 16,000 girls across the country through its residential empowerment programme.



Minister Ranaj Pegu honouring government employees with Karmashree Award on the occasion of Lok Kalyan Divas on Wednesday. HT Photos

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Never interrupt someone doing what you said couldn't be done. - Amelia Earhart

Prashant Kishor's victory

Jan Suraj Party's supremo Prashant Kishor's win in Bankipur bypoll in Bihar is not an ordinary political event, since its impact is not likely to be limited in one constituency and is one state only. It will have far more serious implications on the political discourse of the country in general, and BJP's current political narrative in particular. Ever since the Bankipur assembly was created after the delimitation order of 2008, it has been BJP's stronghold. Nitin Nabin of the BJP had been winning this seat since 2010 when he had bagged 72.06 per cent of votes. Even in the last election held in November 2025, he had won this seat with 62.66 per cent of votes in his bag. When he became BJP's National President, he was sent to Rajya Sabha, which necessitated his resignation from this seat and bypoll was announced. It was but natural for the BJP leadership to believe that it was a secure seat for the party, and in overconfidence former Union Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad was reported saying, "Even if we filed a dog or a cat on a BJP ticket in Bankipur, it will win." Ravi Shankar later denied making such a statement, but by that time damage had already been done. RJD leader Tejaswi Yadav later claimed that PM Narendra Modi did not visit Bankipur for the election campaign fearing BJP's defeat.

There is a double engine government of BJP – both in Bihar and at the Centre. In spite of that the Bankipur bypoll result shows BJP's humiliating defeat. BJP's Neeraj Kumar Sinha was defeated by Prashant Kishor by a margin of 19324 votes. BJP could bag only 44,827 votes which was only 34.40 per cent of the total valid votes polled, which is 28.26 per cent less than what the party had got in the 2025 election held only eight months ago. In contrast, JSP had got only 7,717 votes in the November 2025 election which was only 4.92 per cent of the total votes polled in the Bankipur assembly constituency. Now JSP Supremo Prashant Kishor bagged 64,151 votes with a vote share of 49.23 per cent, which is a gain of 44.31 per cent.

Such a huge change of mood of the people within a short span of time of only eight months is worth noting, because it reflects total disenchantment of the people from PM Narendra Modi's leadership and BJP governments at the Centre and in the state. Such huge swings of votes in favour of JSP and against BJP can in no way be explained. Prashant Kishor's win not only signals troubles for BJP but also troubles for its ally Nitish Kumar led JD(U). NDA in Bihar will have to reconsider their current political strategy to face the rise of Jan Suraj Party as the third political force.

Human activities behind Upper Assam flood disasters

Floods are an inseparable part of Assam's geography, but the unprecedented devastation witnessed in Upper Assam during the recent monsoon has demonstrated that natural forces alone cannot explain the scale of destruction. Districts such as Sivasagar, Charaideo and Jorhat, which have experienced seasonal floods for generations, faced a disaster unlike anything in living memory. Thousands of houses were submerged, agricultural land remained under water for days, roads disappeared beneath floodwater, and public infrastructure suffered extensive damage. Scientific studies have long established that the Brahmaputra basin is naturally prone to flooding because of its massive river system, heavy monsoon rainfall, high sediment load and dynamic river channels. Yet these natural conditions have existed for centuries. The question therefore is why floods have become more destructive and why regions that were once considered comparatively safe are now suffering repeated inundation. Recent research and field observations increasingly suggest that human activities have significantly reduced the natural capacity of the landscape to absorb and regulate floodwater. Excessive deforestation, unscientific hill cutting, illegal mining, destruction of wetlands, encroachment upon natural drainage channels and poorly planned development have collectively weakened the ecological balance that once moderated flood intensity. The recent flood has also triggered widespread debate regarding environmental degradation along the Assam-Nagaland border, where allegations of illegal stone and coal extraction and large-scale tree felling have attracted public attention. While scientific investigations are still required to determine the precise contribution of each activity, environmental experts agree that changes in land use and degradation of upstream catchments increase runoff, accelerate soil erosion and transport enormous quantities of sediment into rivers. These processes reduce the carrying capacity of rivers and increase the possibility of sudden flooding. A recent review on the Brahmaputra basin

concluded that climate change, land-use changes, river dynamics and human intervention now interact to create increasingly severe flood conditions.

The recent floods therefore represent the combined outcome of natural processes and decades of environmental neglect. Forests in the hills surrounding Upper Assam once acted as natural reservoirs that slowed the movement of rainwater and allowed the soil to absorb moisture before releasing it gradually into streams and rivers. When forests disappear because of commercial logging, road construction, quarrying or illegal extraction of natural resources, this protective system collapses. Rainwater flows rapidly over exposed slopes, carrying loose soil, rocks and debris into rivers within a very short period. The result is flash flooding downstream and rapid sediment accumulation within river channels. Sedimentation gradually raises riverbeds and reduces the volume available to carry floodwater, forcing rivers to overflow even during rainfall events that earlier might not have produced such severe consequences. Recent reports have revived concerns over ignored warnings regarding sand and stone mining along the Dikhow River, where officials had reportedly cautioned years ago that unchecked excavation



DEGREE OF THOUGHT
By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

could alter river behaviour and increase flood risks. Those warnings acquired new significance after the devastating floods in Sivasagar district. At the same time, several organisations have alleged that illegal mining and widespread tree felling in the hill areas bordering Nagaland intensified this year's disaster by destabilising hill slopes and increasing sediment movement into rivers. The state government has focused primarily on rescue and rehabilitation while public debate continues regarding the role of environmental degradation in worsening the floods. Regardless of political disagreements, the scientific evidence remains clear that degradation of upstream ecosystems directly affects downstream flood intensity. Climate change has also added another layer of complexity. Rising temperatures are increasing the frequency of extreme rainfall



events across Northeast India, causing rivers to receive unusually large volumes of water within very short periods. When such rainfall occurs in landscapes already damaged by deforestation, mining and poor land management, the destructive impact multiplies rapidly. The recent Upper Assam disaster illustrates this dangerous interaction between environmental degradation and climate variability.

Another major contributor to flood disasters is the gradual destruction of Assam's natural drainage system through unplanned development and weak environmental regulation. Wetlands, beels and low-lying floodplains once stored excess rainwater and reduced pressure on rivers during peak monsoon periods. Many of these natural water bodies have gradually disappeared because of encroachment, construction activities and conversion into residential or commercial land. As a result, rainwater that once spread across wetlands now rushes directly into rivers and settlements. Similar problems arise when natural drainage channels are blocked by roads, embankments or unplanned urban expansion without adequate drainage infrastructure. The consequences become especially severe during prolonged heavy rainfall, when water has no safe outlet and remains trapped across large areas for extended periods. Embankments have undoubtedly protected many communities over the years, yet experts increasingly argue that embankments alone cannot provide a permanent solution because many structures have aged considerably

and require continuous scientific maintenance. Where embankments fail, the resulting floods often become more destructive because accumulated water is suddenly released into densely populated areas. Modern flood management therefore requires a basin-wide perspective rather than isolated engineering interventions. Recent research assessing flood vulnerability across the Brahmaputra Valley found that millions of people remain exposed because environmental vulnerability combines with economic dependence on agriculture, inadequate infrastructure and limited adaptive capacity. Nearly forty per cent of the Brahmaputra Valley remains vulnerable to flooding, making ecological conservation an essential component of disaster management rather than merely an environmental concern. Long-term planning should therefore include restoration of degraded forests, protection of wetlands, regulation of mining activities, continuous monitoring of river morphology and scientific management of hill catchments and stricter enforcement of environmental laws. These measures demand coordination among multiple departments and neighbouring states because rivers ignore administrative boundaries while floods affect entire landscapes. Without such integrated planning, each year's flood is likely to become more damaging than the last.

Upper Assam now stands at an important turning point. The recent disaster should not simply be remembered as another severe flood but as a warning that existing ap-

proaches are becoming inadequate in the face of changing environmental realities. Relief operations, compensation packages and reconstruction programmes remain essential because affected families require immediate assistance to rebuild their lives. Yet relief cannot substitute for prevention. Every flood that destroys homes, schools, roads and agricultural fields also reflects failures in environmental planning accumulated over many years. Protecting forests in upstream catchments, preventing illegal mining, restoring wetlands, preserving natural drainage systems and enforcing responsible land-use policies are no longer optional environmental objectives. They are essential investments in public safety and economic security. Early warning systems should continue to improve through modern forecasting technology, but warnings alone cannot reduce flood intensity if ecological degradation continues unchecked. Scientific monitoring, transparent environmental governance and strict implementation of existing laws must become central elements of flood management policy. Community participation is equally important because local residents often possess valuable knowledge regarding changing river behaviour, blocked drainage channels and vulnerable locations. Their observations should complement scientific research rather than remain outside the planning process. The Brahmaputra will always flood because flooding is part of its natural character, and no policy can completely eliminate that reality.

However, there is a significant difference between living with seasonal floods and suffering avoidable disasters intensified by human actions. Recent evidence increasingly indicates that environmental degradation has amplified the destructive power of floods across Upper Assam, making ecological conservation inseparable from disaster risk reduction. If governments, local communities, scientists and policymakers work together to restore environmental balance while pursuing sustainable development, future floods may still occur, but their human and economic costs can be substantially reduced. The challenge before Assam is therefore not to fight against nature, but to stop weakening the natural systems that have protected the region for generations.

After the floods, a second chance for sali paddy

Direct Seeded Rice (DSR) with pre-sprouted seeds offers a timely, cost-effective pathway to restore kharif production in Assam

By: Mowsam Hazarika

For thousands of farmers across Assam, the annual monsoon brings both sustenance and uncertainty. While the floods of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries replenish soils with fertile silt, they also submerge standing crops, particularly Sali paddy—the mainstay of the State's food economy. This year, as in many others, vast stretches of farmland have been affected, leaving cultivators anxious about lost investments and a shrinking agricultural window.

Yet, as the waters recede, agronomic science offers a practical route to recovery. Farmers need not wait for the season. With timely action and appropriate technology, it is still possible to raise a successful rice crop. One such option—Direct Seeded Rice (DSR) using pre-sprouted seeds—has emerged as a reliable, field-tested method for post-flood situations.

• A practical alternative

Conventional rice cultivation in Assam relies on raising seedlings in nurseries and then transplanting them into puddled fields. This method, though widely practiced, is time-consuming and labour-intensive. In a post-flood scenario—when days have already been lost and labour is scarce—transplanting becomes difficult to execute within the remaining season.

DSR simplifies the process by eliminating nursery raising and transplanting. Seeds are sown directly in the main field, allowing farmers to re-establish the crop quickly and make effective use of residual soil moisture. The approach has been increasingly recommended by extension agencies in flood-affected districts.

• Choosing the right variety

With the cropping window shortened, varietal choice becomes critical. Farmers who can sow between late July and the first week of August may opt for the medium-duration variety Numoli (130–135 days), known for its stable performance.

For delayed sowing—common after prolonged inundation—short-duration varieties such as Luit, Kapilee and Dichang (90–100 days) are more suitable. These varieties are specifically recommended for pre- and post-flood conditions, enabling harvest within a compressed timeframe.

• Seed preparation

Successful crop establishment under DSR hinges on proper seed preparation. Healthy seeds should first be treated with



a fungicide to guard against seed-borne diseases. They are then soaked in clean water for 24 hours.

After draining, the seeds are kept in a gunny bag or wrapped in cloth for another 24 to 36 hours. This incubation triggers germination. When tiny sprouts of about 1–2 mm appear, the seeds are ready for sowing. Care must be taken to avoid over-sprouting, which can lead to breakage during handling.

• Field preparation and sowing
Fields should be drained of excess water and levelled thoroughly. Uniform land levelling ensures even seed distribution and better crop establishment.

Pre-sprouted seeds may be broadcast evenly or sown in rows at about 20 cm spacing. Line sowing is generally preferred, as it facilitates easier weed control and crop management. During the first 7–10 days, the soil should be kept moist, but water stagnation must be avoided to ensure proper seedling establishment.

• Why DSR matters now
The advantages of DSR are particularly relevant in the present context:

- It eliminates the need for nursery raising and transplanting.
- It saves 10–15 days—crucial in a shortened season.
- Labour requirements and cultivation costs can be reduced by 30–40 per cent.
- It allows farmers to resume cultivation soon after floodwaters recede.
- It makes efficient use of residual soil moisture, reducing immediate irrigation needs.

For small and marginal farmers—who bear the brunt of flood losses—these benefits translate into lower risk and improved chances of recovery within the same season.

• Management is key

Despite its advantages, DSR is not without challenges. Weed management is critical, as the absence of standing water during early growth stages encourages weed proliferation. Timely weeding—manual or chemical—is essential. Balanced fertiliser application, based on soil conditions, supports healthy crop growth. Regular monitoring for pests and diseases is equally important, with prompt interventions where necessary. Farmers must also ensure adequate drainage to prevent waterlogging in case of subsequent rainfall.

• Towards climate-resilient farming
Assam's agriculture is increasingly shaped by climate variability. Erratic rainfall and recurrent floods demand adaptive practices that can respond to changing conditions. DSR fits into this framework of climate-resilient agriculture by offering flexibility in sowing, reducing dependence on labour and water, and enabling rapid crop re-establishment.

Extension efforts by the Agriculture Department and agricultural universities have been promoting such approaches, though wider adoption will depend on awareness, timely availability of quality seeds, and field-level support.

• An opportunity amid adversity
For farmers, a flood-damaged field need not signal the end of the kharif season. Instead, it can mark the beginning of a recovery cycle—provided decisions are taken without delay.

Adopting Direct Seeded Rice with suitable varieties can help restore productivity, secure a harvest, and mitigate financial losses. In a region where agriculture is both livelihood and legacy, such adaptive strategies are essential.

As the floodwaters withdraw, they leave behind more than silt and debris. They leave a narrow but real window of opportunity. With informed choices and timely action, Assam's farmers can still turn their fields green again.

Lok Kalyan Diwas: A day that celebrates the spirit of public service

History often remembers leaders for the offices they held, but only a few are remembered for the values they left behind. In Assam, August 5 is observed as Lok Kalyan Diwas, a day dedicated to the memory of Bharat Ratna Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi, the state's first Chief Minister and one of the foremost architects of its modern identity. More than a memorial observance, the day is an occasion to reflect on the ideals of selfless leadership, accountable governance and public welfare that Bordoloi championed throughout his life.

The phrase Lok Kalyan literally translates to "the welfare of the people," making the observance particularly meaningful. It underlines the principle that the legitimacy of any government rests not in the authority it exercises but in the well-being it delivers to its citizens. In remembering Bordoloi, Assam honours a leader who consistently placed public interest above political ambition.

Born in 1890, Gopinath Bordoloi emerged as one of Assam's most influential freedom fighters. Drawn to Mahatma Gandhi's call for national awakening, he joined the Indian freedom movement and participated actively in campaigns against British rule. His repeated imprisonment only strengthened his resolve to work for an independent and united India.

Yet Bordoloi's greatest contribution came during the turbulent years preceding Independence. When the British proposed the Cabinet Mission Plan in 1946, Assam faced the possibility of being grouped with Bengal, raising fears about the state's political future and cultural identity. Bordoloi firmly opposed the proposal and argued that Assam's destiny should not be determined without the consent of its people. His determined efforts ensured that Assam remained within the Indian Union after Partition—an achievement that continues to shape the state's political and social landscape.

As the first Chief Minister of independent Assam, Bordoloi confronted enormous challenges. Refugee rehabilitation, economic reconstruction, social

harmony and institutional development demanded visionary leadership. He responded by strengthening education, encouraging agricultural development, improving public administration and safeguarding the interests of tribal communities. His governance reflected a rare combination of administrative efficiency and human sensitivity.

Recognising this remarkable legacy, the Government of Assam instituted Lok Kalyan Diwas to commemorate his death anniversary. The observance is intended not merely to honour a distinguished leader but also to inspire those serving in public institutions. Every year, government departments organise commemorative programmes, while the prestigious Lok Sewa Award is presented to civil servants who have demonstrated exceptional dedication, honesty and innovation in public service. The award reinforces the idea that governance is ultimately judged by the quality of service delivered to ordinary citizens.

The relevance of Lok Kalyan Diwas has grown in recent years. Governments today are expected to deliver faster services through technology, build modern infrastructure and stimulate economic growth. While these objectives are important, Bordoloi's legacy reminds policymakers that development must always remain people-centric. Economic indicators may reflect progress, but true success is measured by whether citizens experience better healthcare, quality education, secure livelihoods and equal opportunities.

The observance also carries an important message for young Indians. In an age often dominated by political polarisation and instant communication, Bordoloi's style of leadership offers valuable lessons. He believed in dialogue instead of division, institution-building instead of personality-driven politics and constitutional values over short-term political gains. His life demonstrates that public trust is earned through integrity, humility and consistent service rather than through popular slogans.

Educational institutions across Assam frequently organise debates, essay competitions and lectures on Lok



Kalyan Diwas, enabling students to understand both the history of the freedom movement and the responsibilities of democratic citizenship. These programmes ensure that Bordoloi's contributions remain part of public consciousness rather than confined to history books.

The day also serves as a reminder that good governance is a continuous responsibility. Every generation inherits institutions built by those before it, and every generation must strengthen them for those who follow. This philosophy was central to Bordoloi's public life. He viewed leadership as stewardship—a responsibility to protect the interests of future generations while addressing the needs of the present.

As Assam continues to pursue rapid economic growth, industrial expansion and social progress, the values represented by Lok Kalyan Diwas remain as relevant as ever. Transparency, integrity, inclusiveness and compassion are not outdated ideals; they are essential foundations of effective governance. Remembering Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi is therefore not simply about paying tribute to a distinguished statesman. It is about reaffirming a timeless principle: that the true measure of leadership lies not in political power but in the positive difference it makes to the lives of ordinary people. On Lok Kalyan Diwas, Assam celebrates not only the memory of one of its greatest sons but also the enduring ideal that public office is, above all, a commitment to public welfare.

(The author is a civil engineer, consultant (invitee) to Rashtriya Raksha University under the Ministry of Home Affairs and a columnist. The Views are personal. He can be reached at sid-dharth001.roy@gmail.com)



AUTHOR
By: Siddharth Roy

Assam isn't drowning, Assam has drowned

By: Zeba Zoariah Ahsan

Assam isn't drowning, Assam has drowned. Drowned because whatever visuals and videos that have been documented and are being put up on the internet have been deeply disturbing and heartbreaking to say the least. Everyone around me has been feeling helpless even though help has reached places in the form of flood relief. Even then, so many are yet to receive help. I had been discussing about the recent Assam floods with my friends, family and colleagues and we all agree that this episode of flooding is unusual, abnormal and unnatural of course. A natural disaster of this scale has pushed communities on the brink of extinction. Might sound exaggerated, but it's not, as it has now pushed people into inter-generational poverty. Many of my own friends and relatives have been impacted by these floods in Sibsagar and Jorhat, with massive damage to property.

This is a state that essentially is the gateway to the northeast of India and more so is a gateway to South east Asia. Assam is extremely resource rich. By resource rich, I mean tea, oil, natural gas, coal, timber, silk, bamboo, lemon, coconut, betel leaf, rice, etc. Even the 'oud perfume' that has found a newfound obsession among Indian homes, doesn't come from the middle east. It actually comes from Assam. And the districts of upper Assam that have been worst hit, are in fact the areas where all these natural resources are found in abundance.

But, more than these natural resources, it's the human resource and livestock that have been majorly hit. I mean how exactly will 'flood resilience' pan out, when croplands have been washed away putting an immediate threat to food security or roads that were arterial, connecting villages in Upper Assam have now been washed away- in fact, it now looks like a river, a waterway with no sight of land for kilometres at a stretch. Loose and wet soil also gives rise to 'quick sand' or 'daldal', a process scientifically called 'soil liquefaction'. It can also happen during an earthquake.

Tragedies strike unannounced

This whole episode, in my opinion, straight up looks like the Biblical story of 'Noah's Ark', which has threatened an entire civilisation to abandon their homes, schools, lands, namghors or neo-Vaishnavite monasteries and even documents that goes onto prove whether they are citizens of this nation or not.

Flooding, isn't about water alone. Flooding also means soil and sediments getting transported from one place to another and the appalling visuals of people wadding through chest-deep waters or knee-deep mud & soil prove the same. Coming to accountability- well that provides a grim picture,



for power and land hungry people aren't ready to face consequences yet. There have been a lot of confusion surrounding the definition of a 'cloudburst', as in what is the minimum value of precipitation that qualifies to be cloudburst? I have never heard of a cloudburst event to have happened in Nagaland before. So how come now?

More importantly, the impacted districts of Jorhat, Sibsagar and Charaideo have not really been perennially flood prone districts of Assam as opposed to Dhemaji and North Lakhimpur districts in the north bank of the Brahmaputra, that otherwise always remain in the news because of floods and essentially lie downstream of Arunachal Pradesh.

Embankments are the easiest and traditional ways of containing flood waters across the world. Assam imports a lot of geotextiles, yet the Brahmaputra and its tributaries make it tough every year when these embankments get breached. Malaysia for instance is one of the largest suppliers of geotextiles in the world and until some years

ago these engineering materials used to be so costly that it would end up exhausting state funds. This also goes on to show why local solutions are needed for an overall sustainable management of water resources. It simply does not end in containing a river body, but working together from a multi-disciplinary lens that takes into account land, people, livestock and local biodiversity.

A history lost in real time

Jorhat, Sibsagar and Charaideo are in fact not just border districts with Nagaland, they essentially lie downstream of Nagaland. I have taken countless road-trips from Dulaijan to Guwahati my whole life, and every time I peep outside my car window to look at the Dikhow river and the fertile plains that have been feeding generations after generations for hundreds and thousands of years. People need to remember, that Dikhow river that is now in the news, originates in the Zunheboto district in Nagaland before reaching the Assam plains.

This river has a lot of historical and cultural ref-

erence across various ethnic and religious groups. The river's course has changed today and it's not only swollen up but has swallowed up parts of a rich civilisation. It has been reported that many Ahom-era monuments have suffered structural damage and that over 1000 ancient manuscripts have been imperiled in the historic districts of Sibsagar & Charaideo. For context, manuscripts were traditionally written on 'Sanchipat' or the bark of the Sanchi tree. Sanchi tree in English is nothing but the Agarwood tree, that is the source of 'oud' perfumes.

Many of these also included some rare handwritten manuscripts that included copies of the Bhagwat Purana, Naamghosa and Kirtan Ghosa - texts that form the bedrock of the neo-Vaishnavite culture as propounded by Srimanta Sankardev, the 15th century Bhakti saint and scholar and Assamese polymath. He is also credited for giving India, one of her eight classical dances, i.e., Satriya dance. In 2027, Assam is set to get the 'Vrindabani Vastra' created by Sankardev, on loan

from the British Museum for 18 months. It is an iconic moment, as it will open the doors to the public to witness the 'cultural and intellectual magnanimity' that he possessed. But, the Assamese community today, is collectively mourning as to how incomprehensibly damaging these floods have been. Loss that is perhaps permanent; one that has drowned the past, present and the future!

What's missing in today's political climate?

We have drone technology today that gives an idea of the extent of the damage, but remember, there was a time when TV journalists were often found accompanying ministers in choppers discussing about a flood situation, assessing the economic losses and the future course of action- such a thing is not visible in today's political climate. It's rather impossible to get such bytes today. Probably, this is where all these social media videos become so important as things gets documented in real time while important media houses in distant New Delhi sleeps on this issue, well because it's not a popcorn worthy moment.

As of 1 August 2026, according to an official PIB notification, Assam has been sanctioned close to Rs 380 crores as an advanced release of the first instalment of the central share of SDRF for the financial year 2026-27. It's not a very big amount for the extent of damage that has happened to my homeland. I also take this platform to highlight the help coming in from so many countless sources- the donations have helped to a great extent to reach these far flung and submerged places. The aftermath of any natural disaster is again an area that needs utmost preparedness, because floods create a public health emergency. Snake bites, cholera, typhoid, vector borne diseases like malaria and dengue fever usually see a huge spike in the monsoon months. There can be no aversion of a disaster or epidemic without systems thinking in place.

Such flood disasters in a changing climate should be a wake-up call, as it's pertinent more than ever now as to how non-traditional security threats can lead to conflict or inter-state water disputes. It's a proof once again that this ongoing crisis and catastrophe is clearly a mismanagement of water resources. Early warning system alerts from state disaster management authorities clearly fail when there is no preparedness from the administration to evacuate villages and people downstream in the event of a very heavy rainfall or even if there is release of water from an upstream dam- which gets marketed as a 'development project' without any proper environmental impact assessment in sight. It's honestly sinister and criminal in my opinion because the road to recovery from this, even with all the help pouring in will be a long and an excruciating one! (Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz)

As World Bank retreats from climate targets, India's most vulnerable could pay the price



By: Pratyancha Khandare and David Sathuluri

More than 80 percent of India's population lives in districts highly vulnerable to floods, droughts, and cyclones, according to the Climate Vulnerability Index developed by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water. In states such as Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Bihar, that vulnerability is already visible in damaged roads, disrupted farming, and recurring displacement. Local officials know what is needed - higher roads, stronger embankments, safer shelters, and simple early-warning systems. However, the problem is not knowledge, but funding.

Just as these districts need more protection from rising heat and encroaching water, the World Bank has ended its 45 percent climate finance target, a change that could weaken accountability for where money goes. This decision will widen the gap between where climate money is easiest to spend and where it is actually needed. For India's poorest, most climate exposed districts, especially marginalized rural communities, dropping a binding target weakens accountability and makes it easier to bury real adaptation needs under vague "outcomes."

When there is no hard number to meet, money is more likely to flow toward large, easy-to-package projects such as solar parks, grid upgrades, and metro lines. The risk is that large projects are counted as climate work while flood-prone districts wait for funds for embankments, shelters, or early-warning systems. We write this as researchers and advocates who have worked inside government and policy settings and seen how funding commitments shrink as they move from paper to practice.

At COP28 in Dubai, the World Bank set a simple rule: 45 percent of its annual financing would support projects with climate co-benefits, meaning work that either cuts emissions or helps people cope with floods, heat, and drought. The 45 percent climate co-benefits target asked a simple question: how much of the Bank's lending was meaningfully climate related?

In June, under pressure from the United States, the Bank said it would retire that 45 percent target. It now says it will stop counting how much of its lending is climate-related and instead focus on broader "outcomes to maximize development impact," with climate supposedly woven into everything it does.

On paper, that may sound flexible. But without a clear benchmark, it becomes harder for outsiders, including India, to check what is actually being financed or whether the money is reaching the places that need it most.

India needs substantial climate finance each year:

about \$160 billion to \$288 billion annually through 2030 just to keep up with climate change. Flood barriers, drought relief, and heat-resilient homes matter just as much as mitigation projects. But the finance reaching adaptation work on the ground remains far below what is needed, and states are stuck with strained budgets, borrowing limits, and no steady pipeline of support to count on.

Most climate finance still goes where it is easiest to lend: grid upgrades, solar parks, wind farms, transmission lines, and green hydrogen. These usually sit in or near big cities and industrial corridors. Meanwhile, the smaller projects that save lives in villages and districts - embankments, water systems, shade, cooling centers, and shelters - struggle to find funding. Wealthy nations have repeatedly promised to close this gap, but the shortfall remains. For most Indian states, cheap long-term loans and guarantees from major lenders remain the only realistic path to real climate protection. So, when the World Bank weakens firm climate commitments, these states are left wondering how they will cover even the basics.

The neglected districts are home to Dalit, Adivasi, and other marginalized communities, often landless laborers and informal workers. Their voices rarely shape how public money gets spent. It is also hard to track whether adaptation funds ever actually reach them. A hard number in climate lending gave activists, journalists, and local leaders something to point to. Take the number away, and these communities are being asked to trust a system that has often put them last in line.

The World Bank itself argues that projects with climate co-benefits are "smart development" and says it is shifting from measuring climate inputs to measuring outcomes across its broader portfolio. That sounds plausible, but in an unequal system the loss of a floor can quickly become the loss of a priority. For India's marginalized districts, flexibility without a hard minimum may simply mean more delay for the projects that matter most.

If the World Bank wants to prove that retiring its climate target is not a retreat, India should ask for two concrete commitments in return. First, a public guarantee that a fixed share of climate lending reaches the most exposed districts and communities. Second, transparent, publicly auditable reporting on where every climate rupee goes, so climate finance can be tracked for equity.

From a meeting room in Washington, the new era may look like smart, flexible development. From a flooded panchayat (local government) office in Bihar, it looks like an embankment, shelter, or warning system pushed further out of reach. (Courtesy: The Diplomat)

From Khadi to fast fashion: The changing face of Indian textiles

By: BKP Sinha, Arvind Kumar Jha

The evolution of Indian textiles, from ancient civilisation to modern times, mirrors the profound political, economic and social transformations that India has undergone- from colonialism and nationalism to industrialisation, economic liberalisation, globalisation and consumerism. Each of these periods has influenced the way textiles are produced, garments are designed and clothing is consumed.

The textile industry has been one of the oldest pillars of India's economy and an enduring symbol of its rich cultural heritage, regional diversity and artisanal craftsmanship. Its origins date back to the Indus Valley Civilisation.

During the Mauryan period, textile production expanded considerably under a more organised administrative system. Cotton remained the dominant raw material for textile production, while linen, silk and woollen fabrics were also produced in different regions of the empire.

These textiles were traded extensively within the Indian subcontinent and exported through well-established overland and maritime trade routes to Central Asia, Persia, Egypt and the Mediterranean. The Gupta Empire further strengthened textile production through improvements in weaving, embroidery, dyeing and decorative techniques. Textile centres in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and Kashmir developed distinctive weaving, dyeing, embroidery and printing techniques. Block printing, resist dyeing, ikat, brocade, bandhani and fine silk weaving flourished under royal patronage, and these textiles were exported to Southeast Asia, the Middle East, East Africa and China through maritime trade.

The Mughal Empire marked the golden age of Indian textiles. Royal patronage encouraged the production of luxurious muslin, jamdani, brocade, velvet, silk, pashmina, chintz and richly embroidered fabrics. Textile centres such as Dhaka, Banaras, Ahmedabad, Surat and Kashmir earned global recognition for their textile craftsmanship. Techniques including zari embroidery, gold and silver thread work, block printing, floral motifs and intricate weaving reached exceptional levels of refinement.

The arrival of European trading companies, particularly the Portuguese, Dutch, French and British, further expanded international demand for Indian textiles. By the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Indian cotton, silk fabrics, calicoes, muslins and printed chintz had become some of the most sought-after commodities in global trade. However, the fortunes of India's textile industry changed significantly under British colonial rule. India was gradually reduced from being a leading exporter of finished textiles to a supplier of raw cotton for British industries.

Manufacturing

During India's struggle for independence, textiles became powerful symbols of nationalism and self-reliance. The Swadeshi Movement encouraged the use of indigenous products while boycotting imported British textiles. Mahatma Gandhi's emphasis on the spinning wheel (charkha) sought not only to revive rural employment but also to challenge Britain's economic dominance over India's textile trade. Following independence, the Government of India formulated successive Five-Year Plans to promote the expansion and modernisation of textile



mills and introduced a range of policies, institutions and development programmes to support and protect the handloom and handicraft sectors. The opening of the economy in 1991 brought greater exposure to international fashion through global media, organised retail and multinational brands, leading to significant changes in consumer preferences. In the following years, the growth of e-commerce further expanded access to fashionable clothing across different income groups and geographical regions.

As competition intensified, both international and domestic fashion brands adopted shorter production cycles, giving rise to the fast fashion business model. This model significantly increased clothing production and consumption, resulting in greater textile waste and a higher demand for raw materials, water and energy. Today, synthetic fibres such as polyester, nylon and acrylic dominate the fashion industry because they are inexpensive, durable, wrinkle-resistant and well suited to mass production. However, most synthetic fibres are derived from petroleum, making them dependent on fossil fuels and energy-intensive manufacturing processes that contribute to greenhouse gas emissions. Unlike natural fibres, they are non-biodegradable and can persist in landfills and the environment for hundreds of years.

In addition, the washing of synthetic garments releases microscopic plastic fibres into rivers, lakes and oceans, where they accumulate in aquatic ecosystems, harm marine life and eventually enter the human food chain. The textile industry contributes about one-fifth of global water pollution and around one-tenth of global greenhouse gas emissions. If current trends continue, these emissions are expected to rise by more than 50 per cent by 2030. The sector also generates approximately 7,793 kilotonnes of waste annually, of which 3,944 kilotonnes consist of post-consumer textile waste. Although a significant proportion is recovered through reuse and recycling, nearly 34 per cent is still disposed of in landfills.

Several chemicals used in textile dyeing, printing, bleaching, finishing and fabric treatment have been identified as carcinogenic. Prolonged occupational exposure to these hazardous substances through inhalation of chemical vapours and aerosols, or direct skin contact during handling and processing, increases the risk of certain cancers, respiratory diseases, skin disorders and allergic dermatitis,

particularly in workplaces where occupational safety measures are inadequate. In several textile-producing regions of India, inadequate treatment or improper disposal of textile effluents has contaminated water, soil and, in some cases, the surrounding air, posing risks to ecosystems and nearby communities.

Textiles & Nonwovens

The industry's water footprint is equally alarming. Producing a single cotton T-shirt requires approximately 2,700 litres of water, while a pair of cotton jeans requires about 9,000-10,000 litres. Cotton cultivation consumes nearly 25,000 litres of water per kilogram of fibre, and textile dyeing and finishing require an additional 125-150 litres per kilogram of fabric.

Today, nearly 95 per cent of cotton cultivated in India is genetically modified Bt cotton. However, its widespread cultivation has raised concerns about pest resistance, rising input costs, increased reliance on chemical inputs to manage secondary pests, biodiversity loss and the growing economic vulnerability of smallholder farmers, particularly in rain-fed regions.

Addressing these challenges requires rethinking the way textiles are produced, consumed and discarded. A shift towards resource-efficient production, cleaner technologies and circular economy principles is essential to reducing the industry's environmental footprint. Equally important is encouraging consumers to make more informed and responsible purchasing choices. Extending the lifespan of garments through repair, reuse and recycling can further minimise waste and conserve natural resources.

Innovation in sustainable materials, cleaner production technologies and effective waste management will also play a vital role in reducing the industry's environmental footprint. Stronger environmental regulations and their effective enforcement are equally essential to ensure compliance with sustainable production practices. Alongside these environmental measures, preserving traditional textile crafts and supporting artisans is important for safeguarding India's cultural heritage and sustaining rural livelihoods. Ultimately, achieving a more sustainable and equitable future depends on the collective commitment of all stakeholders. The question is not whether fashion will continue to evolve, but whether that evolution will be guided by sustainability or driven by folly. (Courtesy: The Pioneer)

Japan's anti-disaster agency reported more than 18,000 people with heat stroke symptoms

Record heat wave impacts people and animals in Japan and Korean Peninsula

SEOUL, Aug 5: Fans fainting at a baseball park. Lions dying at a zoo. A woman taking shelter in a car found dead. A doctor advising people to eat dog meat to promote stamina.

The scenes caused by a record heat wave in Northeast Asia illustrate how extreme temperatures have gripped South Korea, North Korea and Japan.

In most of South Korea, a major heat wave advisory was in place Wednesday as temperatures in densely populated greater Seoul, home to 20 million people, and adjacent areas soared as high as 39 degrees Celsius (102.2 degrees Fahrenheit).

North Korean authorities have issued a heat wave advisory in many areas and called for people to take safety steps to avoid heat-related health problems.

Japan's anti-disaster agency reported more than 18,000 people with heat stroke symptoms were transported to hospitals during the week of July 20 to 26.



South Korea heat is a national disaster

Since mid-May in South Korea, about 2,220 people have been diagnosed with heat-related illnesses and 19 have died, according to a report from Interior and Safety Ministry. About 17,140 livestock, such as chickens, ducks and pigs, and about 160,000 farmed fishes also have died.

On Sunday, the southeastern city of Yangsan saw temperatures reaching 42.5 Celsius (108.5

Fahrenheit), the highest figure recorded since weather observation began in Korea in 1904.

In a Cabinet meeting Tuesday, President Lee Jae Myung instructed officials to view the ongoing heat wave as "a national disaster" and make all-out efforts to protect lives.

On Tuesday night, a spectator in his 20s collapsed while watching a baseball game between SSG Landers and LG Twins at a stadium in Incheon city, west of Seoul. Emergency personnel administered CPR and transported him to a hospital, halting the game for about 10 minutes.

Another fan in his 20s fell unconscious and received treatment at the stadium after the game, according to the Korea Baseball Organization, which announced Wednesday that all 10 games scheduled for Wednesday and Thursday were cancelled and would be rescheduled.

North Korean hospital official recommends cooling food

Min Son Yong, deputy director of the internal medicine department at Pyongyang General Hospital, told North Korea's main Rodong Sinmun newspaper on Sunday that people should eat dog meat and fish porridge to supplement protein to beat the heat.

Euphemistically known as "dang-gogi," or sweet meat, dog meat has long been considered a stamina food in North Korea and is traditionally eaten during the hottest time of the year. (AP)

WHO chief visits Congo to support Ebola efforts as some workers strike over pay

KINSHASA (CONGO), Aug 5: The head of the World Health Organisation arrived in Congo on Wednesday as aid workers said the world's fastest-growing Ebola outbreak is spreading at an "alarming" rate and some health workers are striking over lack of pay.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus was scheduled to meet with partners and President Felix Tshisekedi in the capital, Kinshasa, the WHO country office told The Associated Press. It was his second visit since the outbreak was declared in mid-May.

The Ebola outbreak had 3,874 confirmed cases, including 1,751 deaths, as of Monday, according to data published overnight by Congo's Ministry of Health.

In Ituri, the outbreak's epicentre, families said many frontline workers have gone on strike, worsening access to healthcare that was already challenged by rebel conflict in one of Congo's most remote and vulnerable areas, its east near the borders of South Sudan, Uganda and Rwanda.

While some frontline workers



say they have started receiving payment in the last week for work done since the outbreak began, they are demanding improved wages.

Anicet Baluku, a resident of Bunia, Ituri's capital, blamed the death of his two brothers from Ebola on the strike. "We urge the authorities to quickly find a solution to prevent other families from experiencing the same tragedy," he told the AP.

The outbreak has eclipsed all other Ebola outbreaks in history in its speed of transmission and is the second-largest outbreak on record, behind the 2014-2016 West Africa

outbreak that recorded more than 28,000 cases, including over 11,000 deaths.

The Bundibugyo virus that is causing this outbreak has no approved treatment or vaccine, and local officials believe it began in a remote area long before it was declared on May 15.

Nearly three months later, the outbreak is still "spreading at an alarming and unprecedented rate," medical charity Doctors Without Borders said Wednesday.

"The response is expanding but is still not reaching communities quickly enough to break transmission chains," the group said. (AP)

Imran Khan's supporters stage protests across Pak as ex-PM completes three years in jail

LAHORE, Aug 5: Former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan's supporters staged protest rallies in several parts of the country on Wednesday to mark three years of his imprisonment, defying police crackdown.

In Punjab province, the police arrested more than 20 workers of Khan's political party for staging a demonstration.

The 73-year-old cricketer-turned-politician has been behind bars since August 5, 2023, after being convicted in a corruption case. There are several cases against him - and convictions in some of them were either suspended or overturned. But he remains in prison pending trial in other cases.

Khan's party workers sought permission from the authorities to organise rallies in several locations across Pakistan's four provinces on Wednesday.

Permissions were denied in Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan

provinces, following which a gathering in Peshawar emerged as the centrepiece of the party's campaign, primarily demanding Khan's release.

At least two of Khan's sisters are expected to address the gathering in Peshawar, the capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, where his party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, is in power.

Despite being refused permission elsewhere, the leadership of the party asked its workers in regional units to organise rallies, senior party leader Sheikh Waqas Akram said.

That led to police crackdowns, and arrests were reported in Punjab. "But we will come out for him (Khan)," Akram added.

Party lawyer Abuzar Salman Niazi said, "Punjab Police have arrested over 20 workers in Mi-anwali, hometown of Imran Khan, stopping them from coming out to demand the release of their leader." (AP)

China announces countermeasures against Washington

BANGKOK, Aug 5: China announced a series of economic measures Wednesday against the United States, including controls on exports of drones to the US and a ban on dealings with six American entities, in response to recent restrictions imposed by Washington.

Tensions are simmering between the world's two biggest economies ahead of an expected visit by Chinese President Xi Jinping to the US in September, despite signs of warming ties during his meetings with US President Donald Trump in Beijing in May.

The Commerce Ministry said the sanctions are in response to recent moves from the US, including a ban by the US Federal Communications Commission on imports of Chinese drones, and the Department of Homeland Security's decision to add 43 Chinese companies to the Uyghur Forced Labour Prevention Act entity list to prevent imports of goods made with forced labour.

The "measures seriously violate the important consensus reached by the two heads of state and severely damage China's legitimate rights and interests. China has no choice but to take necessary countermeasures in response," the ministry said in a statement.

It emphasised that China was acting with restraint and urged the US to scrap its measures against Beijing and cease its "erroneous practices." It also warned of further sanctions if the US rolls out new restrictive measures against China.

Beijing is requiring reviews on a case-by-case basis of exports of unmanned aerial vehicles, their key components and related technologies that are on a list of export-controlled dual-use items that can serve both civilian and military purposes.

Six US entities, including Applied DNA Sciences, Inc. and the non-governmental group Human Rights in China, were banned from engaging in trade or other activities with entities in China.

The ministry also said it was investigating the possible impact on national security of imported printing software and office equipment, but it did not name affected companies.

The State Administration for Market Regulation announced that companies in the US that conduct follow-up factory inspections on behalf of Chinese entities for CCC certification can no longer provide these certifications.

CCC certifications are meant to ensure electronic products meet a basic safety standard. The new rule will oblige US makers of certified electronics to hire auditors based outside of the US or to rely on other non-US designated bodies for such certifications.

In December, the US FCC banned the import of new Chinese drones, though it later revised that ban to allow for some models.

Last week, it also announced bans on imports of new foreign-made humanoid robots and power inverters, citing national security risks, in a move that in effect targets China. (AP)

Bangladesh turns ousted Hasina's official residence into museum

DHAKA, Aug 5: Amid tightened nationwide security, Bangladesh on Wednesday inaugurated a memorial museum to commemorate the victims of violence during the anti-government protests in 2024 that toppled Sheikh Hasina's government.

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman inaugurated the 'July Mass Uprising Memorial Museum' at Ganabhaban, prime minister's official residence during Hasina's regime, coinciding with the day she fled to India on August 5, 2024.

"The killers in the anti-fascist movement will be tried in a transparent, impartial and credible manner following the due process of law," Rahman said in a brief address while unveiling the museum's plaque.

"Justice for every crime is essential to ensure rule of law," Rahman said as the Interim government chief Muhammad Yunus stood beside him.

The prime minister announced that government institutions would be named after slain activists of the uprising and those who were killed during the rule of Hasina's Awami League since 2009.

According to a February 2025 UN rights office report, up to 1,400 people were killed between July 15 and August 15 last year, the period dubbed as the 'July Uprising,' as Hasina's government ordered a security crackdown on protesters.

Three days after Hasina fled to India following the widespread protests against her government over a controversial quota system in jobs, Yunus took over as the chief adviser of the Interim government.

A special tribunal set up by Yunus' government gave Hasina a death sentence in November 2025 on charges of "crimes against humanity" and "genocide." His interim regime, under an executive order, also banned Hasina's Awami League that has been in power for many terms since 1971.

The decision was endorsed by Rahman's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) government after the February 12 elections.

Bangladesh is commemorating August 5 as the 'July Mass Uprising Day' with the government,

political parties and socio-cultural organisations organising various programmes to honour the sacrifices of those, including students, who took to the streets against what they described as Hasina's "misrule and autocracy," according to the state-run news agency Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS).

In a related development, Bangladesh has tightened a nationwide security vigil fearing violence as Hasina is set to make a virtual public address in New Delhi.

The authorities had, earlier this week, ordered a nationwide security alert fearing outbreak of violence coinciding with the anniversary, particularly directing police to take extra care for their own personnel and their vehicles. However, there were no report of any violence till afternoon on Wednesday, officials said.

Paramilitary Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) was deployed to enforce the vigil in southwestern Gopalganj, Hasina's ancestral home district, and birthplace of her father and Bangladesh's founder Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Following widespread protests against her government over a controversial quota system in jobs, Hasina fled to India on August 5, 2024, an event that reshaped the country's political landscape. Three days later, Muhammad Yunus took over as the chief adviser of the Interim government.

On November 17, 2025, the International Crime Tribunal, Bangladesh (ICT-BD) sentenced to death Hasina and home minister of her cabinet Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal after trial in absentia conserving their superior responsibility in committing crimes by their attempt to tame the protesters.

According to media reports and analysts, there has been a sense of unease in Bangladesh since Hasina announced last month to return home by December.

The unease intensified as her party announcement that she would appear virtually to meet the international press at New Delhi-based Foreign Correspondents' Club of South Asia on Wednesday. (AP)

US lawmaker voices concern on FCRA amendments; could hit bilateral ties

WASHINGTON, Aug 5: A US lawmaker has voiced concern over the amendments proposed by India to its laws governing foreign donations received by NGOs, trusts, educational institutions and religious organisations, and said the move could affect bilateral relations.

US Congressman Riley Moore on Tuesday said the amendments to the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) would permit the Indian government to takeover churches and religious charities and would amount to "clear attack against Christians".

"Christians have been in India since St Thomas the Apostle travelled to the Malabar Coast just decades after the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. But despite this long Christian history, India's Parliament is considering amending Foreign Contribution Regulation Amendment (FCRA) rules to permit government takeovers of churches and religious charities," Moore, a Republican from West Virginia, said in a post on X.

"This is a clear attack against Christians. If this bill proceeds in this way, it would be a point of major concern in our bilateral relationship with India," said Moore, a first term Congressman.

The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026 seeks to empower the government to create --a "Designated Authority" to take over the management of foreign contributions and assets created using foreign contributions when an organisation's FCRA registration is cancelled, surrendered or ceases because it is not renewed.

The bill also states that in case of assets that are a



place of worship, the Authority must ensure that its religious character is maintained.

The proposed legislation also reduces the maximum penalty for violation of the Act from imprisonment of five years to one year.

As per the Ministry of Home Affairs, 13,520 organisations received Rs 55,741 crore of foreign contribution between 2019 and 2022. The FCRA portal indicates that, as of July 15, 2026, there are 14,449 active FCRA certificates, 22,498 cancelled and 15,212 deemed as expired. (PTI)

Massachusetts declares August 15 as 'India Day'

WASHINGTON, Aug 5: Massachusetts Governor Maura Healey has declared August 15 as India Day, recognising the contributions made by the Indian diaspora to the state, and urged residents to participate fittingly in observance.

In a proclamation issued on August 1, the governor also recognised the vital role played by community organisations and advocates in fostering civic engagement, cultural exchange and mutual understanding through its annual Independence-Day celebrations and community-service efforts.

A similar proclamation was also issued by Michelle Wu, the Mayor of Boston, declaring August 15 as India Day. She also welcomed the opening of the new Indian Consulate in Boston and celebrated the visit of INS Sudarshini at the SAIL-BOSTON-250 event.

The proclamation issued by the Massachusetts governor said August 15, 2026, will mark the 79th anniversary of India's independence from British colonial

rule in 1947, a historic moment that laid the foundation for the world's largest democracy.

It noted that India has the largest diaspora in the world, with more than 36 million (3.6 crore) people of Indian origin living in other countries. It said over five million (50 lakh) people of Indian origin reside in the United States, who contribute greatly to the social, economic and civic health of the nation and community.

The proclamation said India is a composite civilisation, an ancient nation extraordinarily unique as a cultural mosaic of people embracing a prodigious diversity of ethnic groups, religions, languages, customs, traditions, clothing, gastronomy, climatic conditions and natural resources, and yet presenting an underlying unity.

It noted that the Indian-American population in Massachusetts has made significant contributions in fields, such as medicine, science, technology, education, business and public service, enriching the cultural and economic fabric of the Commonwealth. (PTI)

Nepal's Gandaki province legalises medical cannabis farming and use



KATHMANDU, Aug 5: A provincial government in Nepal has legalised farming and use of marijuana for medical use despite a national ban.

The bill went into effect Monday after it was endorsed by the chief of Gandaki province and allows the farming and medical use of cannabis, said Prabin Poudyal, spokesman for the office of the Chief of Gandaki Province.

Farmers will have to get official permission from the provincial authority and are to be closely moni-

tored.

The provincial law comes despite a national ban on farming, possession and use of marijuana. Anyone possessing marijuana for personal use can be jailed for a month, while distribution and sales are punishable by up to 10 years' imprisonment depending on the amount seized.

Gandaki, one of the Himalayan country's seven provinces, is home to popular mountains and hiking trails and the resort city of Pokhara.

Cannabis is native to Nepal and is widely used during festivals, and activists in Nepal have been trying to get the government to change the law to allow it.

Marijuana was once widely embedded in the country's culture and religion.

But in the late 1970s, the country followed other nations in outlawing marijuana, and chased away the hippies who had flocked to the country. (AP)

Afghanistan's child deaths are rising as food distributions face cuts, UN says

ROME, Aug 5: Child malnutrition has reached critical levels in a third of Afghanistan's provinces and is expected to worsen as funding shortfalls force cuts in food distributions and other support, the UN World Food Program said Tuesday.

"We must act now to stem the rise in child deaths, which this crisis is provoking," John Ayllieff, WFP's country director in Afghanistan, said in a statement, adding that "it is already too late for too many."

Afghanistan continues to recover from decades of conflict and upheaval, including the chaotic withdrawal of US forces in 2021 as the Taliban took power.

Olga Cherevko, spokesperson for the UN humanitarian office in Afghanistan, said nutrition specialists report that "wasting among children has worsened this year in over three-quarters of the country." Children suffering from a condi-

tion known as wasting are acutely malnourished, become very thin for their height, and need immediate therapeutic feeding.

But "too many children arrive at health facilities severely malnourished" while others never make it, Cherevko told reporters at UN headquarters by video from Afghanistan, where she has traveled across the country in recent months and weeks.

WFP said 142 health centers closed in 2025 because of aid reductions and more than 13,000 children lost access to nutrition treatment. It did not mention any specific donor, such as the United States, where the Trump administration has made sweeping cuts in foreign aid.

Nearly 3.7 million Afghan children are projected to suffer from acute malnutrition this year, along with 1.2 million pregnant and breastfeeding women, according to



WFP.

The agency said 12 Afghan provinces have reached critical levels of acute child malnutrition, a record number. It cited a combination of conflict, unemployment, rising food prices, disease out-

breaks, poor water and sanitation and reduced humanitarian funding. The Iran war and other fighting ha delayed deliveries</h2>WFP said supply shortages linked to conflict in the Middle East and the nine-month closure of Pakistan's

border because of fighting between the neighbors have disrupted deliveries of nutrition products, leaving nearly one million malnourished women and children without essential nutrition services for five months.

From August through October, WFP said food distributions aimed at preventing famine in the worst-hit areas are being suspended due to lack of funding, even though the annual peak season for malnutrition is between July and October.

It said it urgently needs USD 540 million over the next six months. WFP previously described cuts as devastating' Humanitarian groups in Afghanistan are grappling with steep funding cuts. In February, Ayllieff told The Associated Press that cuts had been "devastating" and were forcing the agency to turn away three out of four acutely malnourished children. (AP)

'Scale of infrastructure expansion under the Narendra Modi government'

Gen Z should take note of India's infra growth since 2014: Khandu

ITANAGAR, Aug 5: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Wednesday urged the Gen Z to take note of India's infrastructure growth since 2014.

He claimed that 60-70 per cent of the country's present infrastructure has been built by the BJP-led government in the last 12 years, while the remaining 30-40 per cent has been constructed during six decades of Congress rule.

"Something Gen Z should know. In just 12 years, the BJP-led government has built more than 60-70 per cent of India's modern infrastructure. The remaining 30-40 per cent was built over nearly 60 years under Congress-led governments," Khandu said in a social media post.

Highlighting what he described as the "scale of infrastructure expansion under the Narendra Modi government", the chief minister shared data showing major growth across transport, energy, healthcare, education and logistics sectors since 2014.

According to the data shared by



Khandu, the country has developed its entire 2,843-km dedicated freight corridor after 2014, while 99.8 per cent of the recognised startups, numbering 2.30 lakh, have also emerged during the same period.

The figures further showed that 98 per cent of India's solar power capacity, amounting to 162 GW, and 98 per cent of defence exports, valued at ₹ 38,424 crore, have been achieved in the last 12 years.

It also highlighted that 87 per

cent of inland waterways cargo capacity, 85 per cent of the expressway network, 84 per cent of national waterways, and 84 per cent of PNG connections were added after 2014.

The graphics stated that 79 per cent of India's power generation capacity, 51 per cent of crude steel capacity, 44 per cent of coal production, and 42 per cent each of the gas pipeline and transmission networks were built or expanded during the BJP-led government's tenure. (PTI)

reaching 248 GW, has been added since 2014.

Similarly, 75 per cent of the metro rail network, 71 per cent of port capacity, and 69 per cent of railway electrification have been achieved during the period.

The data also showed significant expansion in the health and education sectors, with 65 per cent of AIIMS institutions, 63 per cent of MBBS seats, and 54 per cent of medical colleges being added after 2014.

Road and aviation infrastructure also witnessed rapid growth, with 60 per cent of four-lane and above national highways and 55 per cent of airports developed during the last 12 years.

The chief minister added that 54 per cent of India's power generation capacity, 51 per cent of crude steel capacity, 44 per cent of coal production, and 42 per cent each of the gas pipeline and transmission networks were built or expanded during the BJP-led government's tenure. (PTI)

Manipur govt committed to protecting citizens' privacy: CM

IMPHAL, Aug 5: Manipur Chief Minister Y Khemchand Singh on Wednesday said his government was committed to protecting citizens' privacy while pursuing digital transformation initiatives.

Speaking at the inaugural session of the first State-Level Digital Governance, AI, Cyber Security and Skilling Workshop, jointly organised by the state's IT Department and Microsoft India, Singh said the government aims to build a digitally empowered, inclusive and future-ready Manipur.

He said the partnership with Microsoft reflects the state's vision of leveraging technology to improve governance, create opportunities for young people and enhance public service delivery.

"Our goal is to create a secure, citizen-centric and inclusive digital ecosystem where every citizen, irrespective of location, has access to efficient, transparent and reliable government services," he



said. Singh said the government is focusing on strengthening digital governance while ensuring that technological advancements benefit all sections of society.

He said Microsoft's skilling initiatives would help equip youth, government officials and entrepreneurs with capabilities in emerging technologies such as AI and cybersecurity.

"These skills will boost employment opportunities, encourage innovation and promote entrepreneurship in sectors including agriculture, healthcare, education, tourism and digital services," he said.

Singh said the state government would continue to prioritise the privacy and security of citizens while implementing technology-driven initiatives. (PTI)

APAHC warns against admission to unrecognised allied healthcare institutes

Students advised to verify institutional approvals before enrolling in courses

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Aug 5: The Arunachal Pradesh Allied and Healthcare Council (APAHC) has cautioned students, parents and the general public against taking admission in unrecognised or unauthorised allied and healthcare institutions, warning that qualifications obtained from such institutions may not be valid for professional registration.

In a public notice, the Council stated that the National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions (NCAHP) Act, 2021 regulates standards of education and professional practice, including the recognition of qualifications, regulation of institutions and maintenance of State and Central Registers of qualified allied health professionals.

The Council said it had observed that some institutions were offering admissions to allied and healthcare courses without the necessary approvals, recognition, affiliation, infrastructure, faculty, clinical

training facilities or compliance with the provisions of the NCAHP Act and related regulations.

It warned that certificates, diplomas or degrees issued by such institutions do not automatically confer eligibility for professional registration.

Candidates possessing qualifications from non-recognised or non-compliant institutions may be denied registration in the State Register of Allied and Healthcare Professionals, affecting their eligibility for professional practice, employment and higher education.

The Council advised students and parents to verify the recognition, approval status, affiliation and regulatory compliance of institutions before seeking admission and urged the public to obtain necessary information from the competent regulatory authorities.

It said the notice had been issued to safeguard academic and professional standards in allied and healthcare education in Arunachal Pradesh.

Sikkim CM visits Darjeeling Government College for its 78th Foundation Day

GANGTOK, Aug 5: Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang visited his alma mater, Darjeeling Government College, on Wednesday for its 78th Foundation Day and described the visit as a deeply emotional homecoming as he reconnected with former classmates and teachers.

Sharing photographs on social media, Tamang described the visit as a deeply personal and unforgettable experience.

"Returning to Darjeeling Government College on its 78th Foundation Day was a deeply emotional homecoming. Walking through the familiar corridors, reconnecting with old friends and remembering my teachers brought back countless cherished memories."

"Though life has taken us on different paths, the friendships and values nurtured here remain timeless. I congratulate the entire DGC fraternity and wish the institution continued success in inspiring generations of young minds," he wrote.



Former classmates remembered the chief minister as a quiet, humble and compassionate student who was always willing to help others. They said his simplicity and warmth had remained unchanged despite his rise to the

state's highest political office.

Terming Darjeeling Government College a cradle of knowledge, character and leadership, the Chief Minister congratulated the college community and expressed hope that it would continue to uphold its legacy of academic excellence and produce responsible citizens. (PTI)

Arunachal Governor inaugurates new Lok Bhavan Secretariat building



ITANAGAR, Aug 5: Arunachal Pradesh Governor K T Parnaik on Wednesday inaugurated the Governor Secretariat Building at Lok Bhavan, saying it would remain a platform for dialogue and cultural exchange, bringing governance closer to the people.

Lok Bhavan truly belongs to the people of Arunachal Pradesh and should be regarded as a

house dedicated to the welfare and progress of every citizen, the governor said.

He also said that it would remain accessible to students, entrepreneurs, artists, farmers, and civil society representatives, reflecting the collective aspirations and rich cultural heritage of the state.

Chief Minister Pema Khandu

and senior officers were present at the inauguration ceremony.

Highlighting the state's development, Parnaik said Arunachal Pradesh has made remarkable progress and is steadily setting new benchmarks in public infrastructure.

He praised the quality and architectural excellence of the new Secretariat building, saying it reflects the state's commitment to creating modern and functional public institutions.

Congratulating the Lok Bhavan fraternity, Khandu described Lok Bhavan as a vibrant institution that has brought together people from different regions, communities and cultures.

He said it has evolved into a symbol of inclusive and people-centric governance by promoting dialogue, mutual respect and a shared sense of belonging.

The new secretariat building has been built at a cost of ₹ 10.90 crore. The project began in 2024. (PTI)

Arunachal hotel operator held for 'sexual assault' on girl

ITANAGAR, Aug 5: A hotel operator has been arrested here for allegedly sexually assaulting a 17-year-old girl employed at his establishment in Arunachal Pradesh's Lower Subansiri district, police said on Wednesday.

The accused, a native of Punjab's Ludhiana, used to run a hotel near the Mini Secretariat in Hapoli, and the girl used to work there as housekeeping staff.

According to Lower Subansiri Superintendent of Police (SP) Keni Bagra, the accused told the girl to accompany him on the evening of July 31 to make some purchases.

"In the car, the accused made inappropriate advances towards her. When the girl opposed, he threatened the girl against informing anyone about the incident," the police officer said.

The girl then lodged a complaint, based on which a case was registered against the accused under BNS sections and the POCSO Act.

The SP said that the accused had fled to Ziro but was subsequently tracked down and arrested from Naharlagun. (PTI)

Sporting excellence continues to promote Manipur's prestige: CM

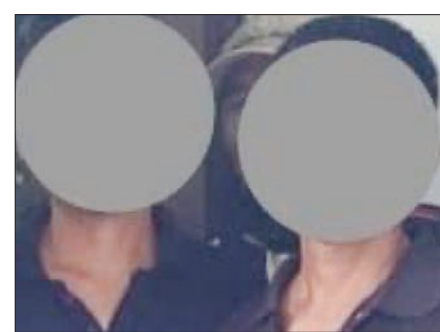
IMPHAL, Aug 5: Manipur Chief Minister Y Khemchand Singh on Wednesday said sporting excellence continues to promote the state's prestige on the national and global stage, an official statement said.

Singh made the remarks during his meeting with Commonwealth Games 2026 silver medalist Jadumani Singh Mandengbam at the chief minister's secretariat.

During the meeting, the chief minister extended his heartfelt congratulations to pugilist Singh for his outstanding achievement, which has brought laurels to both the state and the nation, and conveyed his best wishes to him ahead of the Asian Games 2026, the statement said.

He also expressed confidence in his ability to secure a gold medal. Lauding the "sports movement" in Manipur, the CM remarked that sporting excellence continues to promote the state's prestige on the national and global stage. (PTI)

2 suspected NSCN (IM) cadres arrested



IMPHAL, Aug 5: Two suspected cadres of the banned NSCN (IM) were arrested on charges of extortion in Manipur's Tamenglong district, police said on Wednesday.

The two suspected NSCN (IM) cadres were apprehended from Siblong along National Highway-37 in the Kaimai police station area

on Tuesday, they said.

The arrested men were identified as Gaisauklung Ngomei (45), a resident of Bhalok village, and Job Gangmei (29) of Siblong Part-II, both in Tamenglong district.

Security personnel recovered one live cartridge, ₹ 22,000 in cash and two communication sets with chargers from their possession, police said.

In a separate operation, security forces recovered a cache of arms, ammunition and explosives from the Sendra Hill area near Loktak Lake in Bishnupur district.

The seized items included a .32 pistol with a magazine, an SBBL gun, a .22 bolt-action rifle, a Jefferson rifle with a magazine, nine locally made carbine firearms with magazines, two locally made MP-5 firearms with magazines, and six packets of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), police said. (PTI)

Tripura to convert 5,000 drinking water pumps to solar energy to cut power bills

AGARTALA, Aug 5: The Tripura Renewable Energy Development Agency (TREDA) has launched a project to convert around 5,000 electricity-powered drinking water pumps into solar-powered systems to reduce the state's power bill, an official said on Wednesday.

The Drinking Water and Sanitation (DWS) department currently spends around ₹ 125 crore annually on electricity to operate nearly 10,000 conventional water pumps across the state.

"The high expenditure incurred by the DWS department on water supply came up during a recent review meeting chaired by Chief Minister Manik Saha. Following his directive, we have initiated a programme to convert at least 5,000 water pumps to solar power to reduce electricity costs," TREDA Director General Debabrata Sukaldas told PTI.

As part of the initiative, TREDA has begun the process of converting 2,300 small-bore water pumps into solar-powered units at an estimated cost of ₹ 60 crore.

"The tender has already been floated, and work on the ground is expected to begin shortly. We aim to complete this phase during FY 2026-28," Sukaldas said.

He said the conversion of these 2,300



pumps alone is expected to save the DWS department around ₹ 5 crore annually in electricity charges.

Sukaldas said maintaining conventional electricity supply to water pumps in remote hilly areas remains a major challenge, while extending grid connectivity to sparsely populated locations is often not economically viable.

"Solar-powered pumps will ensure a reliable water supply in such areas while significantly reducing operating costs," he said.

TREDA currently generates around 37 MW of solar power in the state.

Sukaldas also said the state's renewable energy sector received strong investor interest during the 'Destination Tripura: Business Conclave' held last month.

"The state's power sector attracted investment proposals worth ₹ 17,000 crore. A substantial share of these proposals is in the solar energy sector. We are working to translate these investment proposals into projects on the ground," he said. (PTI)

Manipur CM reviews internal security with ITBP IG

IMPHAL, Aug 5: Manipur Chief Minister Y Khemchand Singh on Wednesday held discussions with Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) IG Clay Khongsai on internal security, law enforcement and civic action programmes in the state. In a social media post, Singh said the meeting at the state secretariat focused on strengthening coordination on issues related to security and public welfare. (PTI)

No.DPRD/BTC/(15thFC)/TVIII/Chi-26/2026/6
Dated Kokrajhar the 5th Aug., 2026

PRESS NOTICE

The Director, P&RD Department, BTC, Kokrajhar invites through e-Tendering process for the work of "Const. of Solar Powered Standalone DW facility with Odes System at Balajhar (Activity Code-128531886)." for an amount not exceeding to Rs.26,50,000.00 (Rupees twenty six lakh fifty thousand) only under the Award of 15th Finance Commission (Tied Grant) for the year 2025-26 during 2026-27 from Register Contractor from APWD (Roads/Building/PHED/ Firm, Class, A, B, BTC, etc.

Details may be seen at <http://assamtenders.gov.in> and also at the office of the undersigned during office hours

Sd/- Director,
Panchayat & Rural Development,
BTC, Kokrajhar

IPR(BTC)/C/2026-27/1046

NO.KDB-415/2025-26/5645
Date 05/08/2026

SHORT NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sealed tender affixing a non refundable court fee stamp of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees eight & paise twenty five) only with a validity period of 180 days, which will subsequently to be converted and drawn up in the printed F-2 form are invited from the registered contractors of Class-I (A, B, C) & Class- II categories Assam P&RD and BTC, according to their eligibility for submitting tenders for the works under 15th FC (Untied) fund for the year 2025-26 as stated below. The tender will be received by the undersigned 2.00 PM of 28/08/2026 and will be opened on same day at 3.00 PM.

Sl. No.	Name of Work	Location	A.A. Amount (Rs. In lakh)	Cost of bid document	Amount of bid security	Time of completion
1	Const. of RCC box culvert at near Pujaram house	Ranipur	Rs. 8.84 L	0.03%	SC/ST= 1% OTH = 2%	3 months

Details NIT may be seen in all working days during office hours in the office of the undersigned. Tender will be issued to the contractors or their authorized agent from 06/08/2026 to 28/08/2026 in the office of the undersigned on payment in the form of demand draft/Bankers Cheque from any Nationalized Bank duly pledged in favour of the BDO, Kachugaon Dev. Block, Gurufela.

Sd/-
Block Development Officer,
Kachugaon Dev. Block, Gurufela

IPR(BTC)/C/2026-27/1034

Omar says 'wound not yet healed' as J-K marks seventh anniv of Article 370 abrogation

JAMMU/SRINAGAR, Aug 5: Protests and celebrations marked the seventh anniversary of the abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir on Wednesday, with Chief Minister Omar Abdullah saying the "wounds have not yet healed" and reiterating his resolve to continue seeking the restoration of the region's special status and statehood.

The ruling National Conference and opposition PDP held protests in all districts to mark the seventh anniversary of the abrogation of Article 370 and Article 35A, demanding the restoration of the special status of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir.

Scores of NC leaders, MLAs, and workers, led by Minister Sakina Itoo, assembled at the party headquarters, Nawa-i-Subah, here and held a protest march.

The protesters, carrying placards in support of Article 370 and special status, tried to take the march out of the party office complex but were not allowed to by the police.



Similar protests were reported from other districts of the union territory.

Speaking to reporters, Itoo, the Minister for Education and Social Welfare, said, "We demand that our special status and rights, which were snatched from us, be restored. Our party has been protesting peacefully for the restoration of our rights since then."

PDP leader Ilitja Mufti, along with party leaders, including MLA Pulwama Waheed Para, and spokesperson Mohit Bhan, took out a protest march at Sonwar here.

Raising slogans demanding the restoration of Article 370, the PDP leaders tried to march towards the Dalgate area, but were stopped by the police.

Speaking to reporters, Ilitja said the party wants to protest peacefully.

"I want to remind the prime minister and the home minister that we will fight for it. We want to protest peacefully for it. You are snatching even that right from us. The police here are doing real terror," she said.

She said the way Gen-Zs "brought down the government to their knees", "we will compel them the same way".

"We will make sure that you will have to restore our flag, our law, our constitution, and everything else," she added.

Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha dismissed the protests held by NC and PDP, saying he "did not see" any demonstrations.

"I did not see any (protest). If I see, I will talk to you (about it)," the LG told a reporter when asked

about protests by the National Conference (NC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP).

Sinha said August 5, 2019 -- the date marking the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A -- ended the "discriminatory system" in Jammu and Kashmir.

However, Omar Abdullah said the "wounds" of the people had not yet healed seven years after the abrogation of Article 370, asserting that the Centre's promise to restore statehood to the Union Territory remained unfulfilled.

Abdullah said the people had hoped that at least some of their grievances would be addressed through the restoration of statehood.

"Our wounds have not yet healed. We had hoped that some of the pain would be addressed and that the promise of restoring statehood would be fulfilled. But today marks seven years since August 5, 2019, and that promise remains unfulfilled," the chief minister told reporters in Surankote tehsil of Poonch district. (PTI)

Rahul fears debate in Parliament, makes baseless remarks against RSS: BJP

NEW DELHI, Aug 5: The BJP on Wednesday came down heavily on Rahul Gandhi, saying he is an "immature and part-time" Leader of the Opposition who is disrupting Parliament because he is "scared" of a comparison between the Narendra Modi government's performance and that of the previous Congress-led UPA dispensation.

The ruling party also accused the Congress leader of making "baseless" remarks against the BJP and the RSS, adopting "double standards" on examination paper leaks and running away from debates in Parliament.

The remarks came after Gandhi on Tuesday said the students of the country are in "severe pain" and they do not need Prime Minister Narendra Modi's forgiveness but his apology for his government's action against them.

Speaking at the launch of a book by former MP Vaiko, the Leader of the Opposition had said students are on the streets because of the RSS's attempts to rewrite the country's history, adding that India will not tolerate its history being tram-



pled upon by anybody.

Gandhi said every state has the right to be treated fairly and express its own culture and language, but the RSS wants only the history subscribed to by it to be followed.

Addressing a press conference here, BJP national spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia alleged that Gandhi is an "immature", "part-time" and "irresponsible" Leader of the Opposition and is preventing Parliament from functioning because he fears the Modi government's record will expose the Congress.

"Rahul Gandhi is scared. He knows that the characterless Con-

gress will be exposed when there will be comparison of an effective Modi government and the spineless Congress-led government from 2004 to 2014. Therefore, the obstruction," Bhatia said.

Hitting back at Gandhi's remarks against the BJP and the RSS, Bhatia alleged that the Congress leader suffers from "Modi phobia" and "RSS phobia" and is repeatedly describing the Sangh's ideology as "poisonous" without any evidence.

"Rahul Gandhi has Modi phobia and RSS phobia... Calling an ideology which has served the nation with utmost sincerity 'poisonous' is very easy, but to prove your point is difficult when you do not have any evidence," he said.

Referring to Gandhi's remarks on students and examination reforms, Bhatia alleged that the Congress leader is adopting "double standards" by remaining silent on alleged paper leak cases in opposition-ruled states and claimed the Modi government has strengthened the legal framework to curb such offences. (PTI)

Akhilesh courts Brahmins, says 'PDA' includes pandits

LUCKNOW, Aug 5: Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Wednesday reached out to the Brahmin community, asserting that 'PDA' includes Pandits, and also accused the BJP government in Uttar Pradesh of targeting opposition workers, Brahmins, and religious leaders, including Shankaracharya.

Addressing a Brahmin Sammelan organised at the SP state headquarters here on the birth anniversary of late socialist leader Janeshwar Mishra, Yadav alleged that the state government denied permission to hold the event at its proposed venue, Janeshwar Mishra Park in Gomti Nagar, which forced the party to hold it at their office premises instead.

"People keep talking about PDA and inventing new definitions of it. Ever since they lost to PDA, they have been trying to redefine it. But they have forgotten that the 'PD' in PDA also stands for Pandit. The more they inflict pain (peeda), the stronger PDA will become," Yadav

said. PDA is a term coined by Yadav during the 2022 assembly elections, representing Picchda (backwards), Dalits, and Alipsankhyak (minorities).

Recalling Mishra's contributions to the socialist movement, Yadav described him as "Chhote Lohia" and noted that the park named after him in Lucknow symbolises his stature.

The former Uttar Pradesh chief minister also accused the BJP government of persecuting opposition workers and alleged that several incidents involving SP members had been covered up.

"They were already targeting our workers and us. Now they have also started targeting the Brahmin community. They are after the 'P' of PDA as well," he alleged.

Without naming individuals, Yadav criticised the functioning of the state's health department, claiming it had been "completely ruined".

The SP chief further accused the government of insulting religious institutions and alleged that a Shankaracharya was prevented from taking a holy dip during the Kumbh congregation.

"If there is any example in history where a government stopped a Shankaracharya from taking a holy dip, show us one. The Shankaracharya had to stage a protest, and the police misbehaved with his disciples. A false POCOS case was also filed to intimidate him, but he did not bow down," Yadav claimed.

Yadav was referring to Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati, who made headlines for his confrontation with the organisers of the Magh Mela in Prayagraj, accusing them of preventing him from taking a bath on Mauni Amavasya.

Yadav also accused the BJP of neglecting former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the party's first prime minister. He alleged that the BJP had done little to honour Vajpayee's legacy. (PTI)

Calcutta HC dismisses TMC leader Abhishek's plea to travel abroad for eye treatment

KOLKATA, Aug 5: The Calcutta High Court on Wednesday dismissed Trinamool Congress leader Abhishek Banerjee's plea to travel abroad for eye treatment. The court had earlier advised Banerjee to appear before a medical board at the state-run SSKM hospital here on August 6 for its opinion on the matter.

However, as the TMC leader submitted that he was not ready to do so, the court dismissed his plea to go abroad.

"In view of the submission by the counsel for the applicant (on instructions) that he will not appear before the medical board as indicated by this court, this court finds the issue which is agitated by filing the application ought not to be kept pending further," it said while dismissing the application. The court opined that appearing before doctors at SSKM was necessary to assess Banerjee's medical condition and furnish an opinion before the bench whether it was necessary for him to go abroad or if the treatment can be administered in India.

At this stage, what is important is the treatment of the petitioner; where it will be administered is immaterial, the bench of Justice Saugata Bhattacharya observed. Banerjee's plea for permission to travel to the John Hopkins Institute in the USA came against the backdrop of a string of FIRs registered against him following the change of guard at West Bengal's power corridors. (PTI)

SP deprived youth, farmers and women of debate on ₹ 59,000-cr supplementary budget: Yogi Adityanath

LUCKNOW, Aug 5: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday accused the Samajwadi Party of disrupting the monsoon session of the Assembly and said its conduct had deprived the state's youth, farmers, women and the poor of a discussion on welfare measures proposed in the over ₹ 59,000-crore supplementary budget.

Addressing the media shortly after the Assembly was adjourned sine die, a day before schedule amid Opposition uproar in the House, Adityanath said the government had brought the supplementary budget with provisions for new schemes aimed at youth, farmers, women and the poor, besides allocations for infrastructure development and other public welfare initiatives.

"The (supplementary) budget included provisions for employment generation, skill development programmes, new schemes for farmers, welfare initiatives for the poor and measures to promote the dignity and self-reliance of women," the CM said.

However, he alleged that the opposition, particularly the Samajwadi Party, did not allow any discussion on these issues in the House.

"The Samajwadi Party's conduct is anti-youth, anti-farmer, anti-women and anti-poor," he said.

Adityanath said the supplementary budget

also earmarked funds for infrastructure projects and for demands raised by public representatives.

It further provided for enhanced honorariums for anganwadi workers, ASHA workers, cooks, village chowkidars and fair price shop dealers, besides extending the benefits of government schemes to more eligible beneficiaries, he said.

Despite the disruptions, the Assembly passed the supplementary budget, and the government would soon implement the proposed measures for all sections of society, the CM said.

Referring to the outsourcing commission announced by the government, Adityanath said funds had been provided in the budget to ensure a minimum remuneration and social security benefits for outsourced workers, adding that the proposal would be implemented soon.

He further alleged that the Samajwadi Party's conduct amounted to an insult to workers receiving modest honorariums despite serving the state's 25 crore people with commitment.

Recalling steps taken by his government, Adityanath said the honorarium of 'shiksha mitras' had been increased from ₹ 3,000 to ₹ 10,000 and later to ₹ 18,000. They had also been provided cashless medical treatment of up to ₹ 5 lakh, he said. (PTI)

Amit Shah may speak on FCRA bill Parliament deadlock: Rijiju meets Rahul Gandhi to break logjam

NEW DELHI, Aug 5: In a bid to end the ongoing Parliament logjam, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju on Wednesday reached out to Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi seeking his cooperation for smooth proceedings during the remaining period of the Monsoon Session and also discussed the possible reintroduction of Delimitation and Women's Reservation Bills but did not get any commitment from the Congress leader, sources said.

The sources, however, said it makes no sense as yet to consider any special session, as being talked about in some quarters, as there is one more week left for the session to end on August 13. There has been speculation that the government may convene a brief special session soon after the Independence Day weekend.

Rijiju did not bring up any proposal to extend the ongoing session or call a special one during his

meeting with Gandhi, which lasted for about 50 minutes, but the minister sought the Congress leader's views on the Opposition's stand on the delimitation issue, the sources said.

Rijiju went to Gandhi's office in the Parliament complex for the meeting, during which Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra was also present. Congress Lok Sabha Deputy Leader Gaurav Gogoi and party general secretary KC Venugopal also joined the meeting later.

Gandhi conveyed to Rijiju that a statement by Home Minister Amit Shah on violence against students protesting on the NEET paper leak issue and a discussion on the alleged theft of donations at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya were non-negotiables for the House to function, they said.

While there is no clarity yet on whether the Delimitation Bill will be brought in this session itself before it concludes on August 13, sources said Shah will speak in

Parliament when the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026 is introduced in the House for discussion and passage.

The Opposition has been questioning Shah's absence from the House proceedings.

This is the second time that Rijiju has met Gandhi in the past 10 days. The minister had also made a telephonic call to Gandhi on Tuesday night. Sources said that the minister also plans to meet other opposition leaders, including Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav.

It is learnt that the government is of the view that a fresh Delimitation Bill won't take much time to be readied if there is a sufficient number of parties agreeable to pass it with a two-thirds majority, as is required for the passage of a Constitution Amendment Bill. The government could not muster the numbers during its previous attempt to get the bill passed during the

budget session.

Since the Monsoon session began on July 20, the Lok Sabha has not been able to complete its Question Hour. Five bills have been passed without discussion amid din.

The opposition parties initially protested over the NEET paper leaks and alleged theft of donations at the Ayodhya Ram temple. They later pressed for a discussion on police action against students protesting over the NEET paper leak and also demanded the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Home Minister and their statements.

On Wednesday too, the Lok Sabha was adjourned till 2 pm following opposition uproar in the Lower House. The House was later adjourned for the day.

As soon as the House met, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla asked members to go back to their seats and allow the House to take up the Question Hour. (PTI)

Oppn MPs slam Amit Shah, take out protest march

NEW DELHI, Aug 5: Opposition MPs took out a protest march in Parliament House complex on Wednesday, demanding Home Minister Amit Shah's statement on alleged police excesses against students, discussion on "misappropriation" of Ram temple donations and statehood for Jammu and Kashmir.

Carrying placards and raising slogans against the government, the Opposition MPs, including Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi and Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, marched from the statue of Mahatma Gandhi at Prerna Sthal to Makar Dwar. Kharge demanded accountability from the government.

Taking a swipe at Shah, Kharge asked why hasn't he been coming to the House.

"They are disrespecting Parliament. It has been so many days but they don't want to step inside the House. What is the issue in coming to the House and giving a statement?" Kharge told reporters.

Are they deaf and dumb, he asked.

Later, in a post on X, Kharge said, "INDIA demands answers - Why is the Home Minister shying away from making a statement in the Parliament on the atrocities perpetrated against our youth? Isn't the PM responsible for 'chanda-chadhawa chori' in Shree Ram Mandir?"

Gandhi also slammed Shah and sought answers over the alleged police brutality against students during the July 20 protest over the paper leak issue.

"Amit Shah ji, do not hide; answer the nation's question in Parliament - who ordered the attack on the students?" Gandhi said in his Facebook post.

The MPs carried placards slamming the government and demanded a statement by Shah in both Houses of Parliament on the alleged "atrocities" committed by police and other forces on students during protests over the paper leak issue last month.

Several MPs also raised the issue of "misappropriation" of do-

nations at the Ram temple in Ayodhya. Many MPs, including those from Jammu and Kashmir, carried placards, demanding statehood for Jammu and Kashmir.

Wednesday marks the seventh anniversary of the abrogation of Article 370 and J-K being turned into a Union Territory.

The MPs raised slogans such as 'chhanda chor, gaddi chor', 'Amit Shah jawaab do' and 'chanda chor kahan milenge, BJP ke daftar mein'.

The MPs also kept donation boxes in front of Makar Dwar steps to symbolise the alleged theft of donations at the Ram temple and lined up around them to raise slogans against the government.

Some MPs also put cash in the box to symbolise the donations made and "theft" that took place later. Besides Kharge, Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi, SP's Dimple Yadav and Dharmendra Yadav, TMC's Sagarika Ghose and Mahua Moitra, NCP (SP) Supriya Sule, JMM's Mahua Maji, RSP's NK Premchandran, among others, participated in the protest. (PTI)

Focus is on rehabilitation; special package after assessment: Omar Abdullah

JAMMU, Aug 5: Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Wednesday said the government's focus has shifted from rescue and recovery to rehabilitation and reconstruction in the cloudburst and flash flood-hit areas of Poonch and Rajouri, while indicating that a decision on a special relief package would be taken after a comprehensive assessment of the damage.

Abdullah arrived in Surankote area of Poonch this morning to assess the ground situation in the flash flood and landslide-affected areas following the rain fury, which had claimed 16 lives and left six others missing in the border district of Poonch.

He commenced his tour with a visit to Murrah village where he met a villager, who lost eight members of his family in cloudburst-triggered flash floods and landslide on July 19.

Talking to reporters in Surankote, Abdullah said the im-

mediate priority after the recent floods and landslides triggered by cloudbursts was to speed up rescue operations, trace the missing persons and undertake recovery efforts.

"Now the time has come for rehabilitation and reconstruction. We have to rehabilitate those whose houses have been completely destroyed and also assist those whose houses are still standing but have suffered extensive damage," the chief minister said.

He said the disaster had caused extensive damage not only to residential houses but also to public infrastructure, including flood protection works, roads, schools, hospitals and other government assets.

Abdullah said he would chair a meeting with senior officers in Poonch later in the day after visiting more affected areas to assess the ground situation and finalise measures to provide all possible assistance to the affected people. (PTI)

Chandipura virus outbreak: Health Ministry deploys response teams to Gujarat, Rajasthan

NEW DELHI, Aug 5: The Union Health Ministry has deployed a National Joint Outbreak Response Team (NJORT) to Gujarat and Rajasthan to strengthen the response to the ongoing Chandipura Virus Disease (CHPV) outbreak.

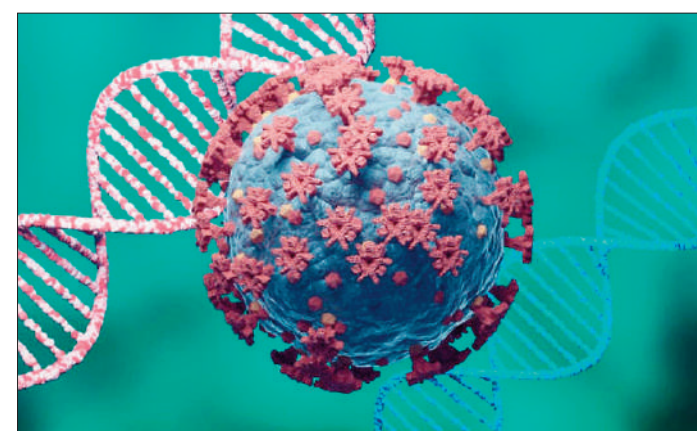
The deployment comes against the backdrop of sustained and intensified scientific investigations by a nationwide network of research institutions, alongside continuous disease surveillance under the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP), coordinated by the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) in close collaboration with State Surveillance Units, the ministry said.

These coordinated efforts are aimed at advancing the understanding of the virus, including its transmission dynamics, clinical spectrum, epidemiology and potential treatment approaches, while guiding evidence-based public

health interventions. The NCDC Public Health Emergency Operations Centre (PHEOC) has also been activated to support the NJORT, the ministry stated.

The multidisciplinary NJORT, comprising experts from the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying (DAHD), will supplement the efforts of the two state governments in outbreak investigation, epidemiological assessment, clinical management, laboratory coordination, vector surveillance and implementation of public health measures, it said. The team will work closely with state health departments to review the on-ground response and submit recommendations to the Ministry after completing its field assessment.

The deployment comes amid



one of the most comprehensive scientific investigations undertaken for Chandipura virus in recent years, the ministry said in its statement.

Experts from ICMR-National Institute of Epidemiology (ICMR-NIE), Chennai, ICMR-National Institute of Vector Control Re-

search (ICMR-NIVCR), Puducherry, ICMR-National Institute of Virology (ICMR-NIV), Pune, ICMR-National Institute for Pre-Clinical Research (ICMR-NIPCR), Hyderabad, and ICAR-National Institute of Veterinary Epidemiology and Disease Informatics (ICAR-NIVEDI), Ben-

galuru are working in close coordination with the Gujarat State Health Department to investigate the outbreak.

The collaborative exercise brings together specialists in epidemiology, virology, entomology, veterinary sciences and laboratory diagnostics to understand the complete clinical spectrum of Chandipura virus infection, from mild febrile illness to Acute Encephalitis Syndrome (AES), and generate evidence for strengthening public health interventions, the statement said.

As part of the investigation, active surveillance has been intensified among patients presenting with Acute Febrile Illness (AFI) and AES in affected districts, while community-based serosurveys are being conducted to estimate asymptomatic infections and assess the true extent of virus transmission. (PTI)

Road accidents: Union Minister Gadkari stresses good training for drivers

NEW DELHI, Aug 5: Union Minister Nitin Gadkari on Wednesday emphasised the importance of proper training for drivers in lane discipline and traffic regulations, noting that road accidents result in 1.8 lakh deaths each year.

Responding to supplementaries during the Question Hour in the Rajya Sabha, he said it is very painful that "every year we have 1,80,000 deaths".

Gadkari said there are a lot of reasons behind such deaths, but "the most important thing is the behaviour of the human being".

"In our country, we need good training for drivers," he said.

The Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways said that scientific training of drivers on lane discipline and traffic rules is very important. The minister was responding to a question by nominated Rajya Sabha member Sudha Murty.

Highlighting that the country has "beautiful roads, but there are a lot more accidents", she asked



whether the government has any procedure or any new scheme so that there should be transparency in the actual method of giving licenses to drivers.

Later, speaking to PTI, Murty said the national highways are fantastic, but many a time, accidents happen due to rash and irresponsible drivers.

"In most such cases, drivers are not well trained, and they might have attained their licenses through backhand channels. There is no proof of how they drive any-

where or any video which stands as a testament to how they passed the driving tests. There are several instances where underage drivers steer vehicles without understanding the consequences," she said.

Murty asked the government to make the process of granting driving licenses more stringent and transparent by including video recordings during tests "so that we can ensure only those qualified drive", and road accidents are reduced.

BJP's Rajya Sabha member

from Haryana, Rekha Sharma, sought to know steps being taken to minimise the delay in completion of national highways projects to ensure their timely completion.

"We have a problem that land acquisition is a state subject. And we have to acquire the land and get environment and forest clearance for the project," Gadkari said.

"We cannot construct a highway in the sky! We need land, and that is exactly a big problem," the road transport minister said.

DMK's P Wilson raised the issue of toll collections, saying even after the recovery of investment, toll fees are charged regularly without any reduction.

He asked whether there will be the constitution of any independent authority to fix toll fees.

Gadkari said that the government has already taken a very popular decision of providing an annual road pass of ₹ 3,000, and a lot of people are appreciating that. (PTI)

NHAI suspends toll on newly-opened Kanpur-Lucknow Expressway after facing flak over damage

LUCKNOW, Aug 5: The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) on Wednesday suspended toll collection on the Kanpur-Lucknow Expressway until repairs to a damaged stretch are completed, and initiated disciplinary action against the concessionaire, the engineer and several officials over alleged lapses in project execution and supervision.

The move follows widespread complaints about damaged portions and patchwork at various locations on the 63-km-long expressway within weeks of its inauguration on July 13.

Several commuters took to social media platforms where they posted videos expressing concern over the construction quality of the multi-crore expressway, particularly those on the Unnao-Lucknow carriageway. Commuters were charged a one-way fee of ₹ 275 for car/jeep/van. However, the annual pass was allowed on the toll.

"Till complete rectification, toll has been suspended. No toll will be charged from commuters on



this expressway. Recovery of the toll loss will be done from the concessionaire," the NHAI said in a statement on Wednesday. The action follows the report of a "slip-page" near Km 64 of the expressway on July 26, it added.

The authority said that the restoration work was taken up immediately after the incident and traffic had been diverted at the affected location.

"At present, traffic has been diverted at this spot and is plying smoothly," it said.

NHAI said it had issued a notice proposing to declare concessionaire PNC Infratech Ltd a non-per-

former, which would make it ineligible to participate in bidding for future NHAI projects. A show-cause notice has also been issued proposing a penalty equivalent to two per cent of the performance security, debarment proceedings for up to three years against the firm's head of pavement/highways and other responsible staff, and a downgrade of the concessionaire's performance rating.

It said the concessionaire had also been directed to rectify the affected stretch at its own cost, currently estimated at around ₹ 3 crore. (PTI)

Services hit as Maharashtra resident doctors begin strike over registration of homoeopaths

MUMBAI, Aug 5: The Maharashtra Association of Resident Doctors (MARD) launched an indefinite strike over the government's decision permitting homoeopaths to register under the Maharashtra Medical Council (MMC) and prescribe allopathic medicines.

The impact of the agitation was felt in OPD (outpatient department) services in medical colleges across the state and those run by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation.

Doctors at the Sir JJ Hospital and Grant Medical College here protested on their premises, raising slogans against the government's decision.

The MMC issued a notification on June 30 permitting homoeopaths to prescribe modern medicines after completing a six-month Certificate Course in Modern Pharmacology (CCMP).

The MARD has demanded the immediate suspension of the BHMS-CCMP (Bachelor of Homoeopathic Medicine and Surgery-Certificate Course in Modern Pharmacology) registration process until the final court verdict.

The organisation alleged that despite multiple rounds of discussions with the government and authorities concerned, it had not received a proper assurance re-

garding the implementation of the BHMS-CCMP policy.

"The strike commenced at midnight. We will observe the developments today. If the government doesn't initiate a dialogue, we will shut down emergency services after 24 hours," Central MARD president Atharva Shinde told PTI on Wednesday.

Shinde added that the strike was observed in 32 medical colleges and those run by the BMC.

"Our opposition is to the law. There should be no cross-path and mixopathy. The Maharashtra government should prioritise services to patients.

"If they (homoeopaths) have pursued education of 5.5 years and get allopathy licence after simply doing a course...it is akin to giving a person a firearm licence and allow him to use weapons indiscriminately," Shinde added.

In Nagpur, resident doctors skipped OPD work at Government Medical College and Research Hospital (GMCH) and Indira Gandhi Government Medical College and Hospital (IGGMC). They staged demonstrations on the hospital premises, holding placards and banners.

Similar scenes were witnessed in government medical colleges across the Vidarbha regions. (PTI)

Gang associate held after exchange of fire with police in Delhi; accomplice escapes

NEW DELHI, Aug 5: A suspected associate of the Neeraj Bawana and Naveen Bali gangs was apprehended after an exchange of fire with police in Delhi's Kanjhawala area, while his alleged accomplice managed to escape after firing at the personnel, an officer said on Wednesday.

Five firearms, including Jigana and Glock pistols, along with 18 live cartridges were recovered during the operation, he said.

According to the police, the Special Task Force (STF) had received specific information that Rahul Dabas alias RDX and Rahul Sehrawat would assemble near Anand Vatika in Ladpur village while carrying illegal weapons, allegedly to commit a crime.

"Acting on the tip-off, the police team laid a trap near the location. On spotting the police, both suspects opened fire, following which the police took cover behind their vehicle and retaliated in self-defence," Joint Commissioner of Police (Northern Range) Vijay Singh said.

During the exchange of fire, Rahul Sehrawat was overpowered and apprehended at the spot, while Rahul Dabas escaped after allegedly firing at the police party, the officers said. (PTI)

J-K administration resolved to dismantle terror network: LG Manoj Sinha

SRINAGAR, Aug 5: Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Wednesday said his administration has resolved to dismantle the terror network and bring its perpetrators to justice to secure a life of peace, equality and hope for every citizen of the Union Territory.

He was addressing an event after handing over appointment letters to 37 Next of Kins (NoKs) of civilians killed by terrorists.

"We are absolutely resolved to dismantle the terror network to bring its perpetrators and enablers to justice and to secure for every citizen of UT a life of peace, equality and hope. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the shadows of discrimination lifted in 2019, ushering in a new era of social justice and inclusive development," the LG said here.

Sinha said that today, J-K is advancing with renewed confidence and all-around development is driving peace and prosperity.

"By ending the system that bred discrimination and terrorism, PM Modi made it clear that in Jammu Kashmir, lamps of prosperity would not burn

only in a select few palaces but also in the huts of the poor," he said.

Referring to one of the victim families, Sinha said that after 33 years, a lamp has been lit in the home of martyr Wali Mohammad Wani of Shopian.

Wani was killed by terrorists on July 16, 1993.

"Today, not only his family but also the entire Shopian feels connected to the national mainstream," the LG said.

He asserted that the terror victim families receiving appointment letters are among the many beneficiaries of this new order post abrogation of Article 370 on this day in 2019.

"Their cases, delayed for decades, have finally been addressed. This is not compensation for loss because no money, no job, no paper can replace a loved one.

"It is, however, an assurance that the nation stands beside them and we are determined to help rebuild lives and restore dignity," he said.

Sinha said that due to Articles 370 and 35A, the terror ecosystem was operating with impunity and they aimed to fracture the society, spread fear and silence the hope and dreams.

"After the abrogation of Article 370, the attempt of a neighbouring country and the terror ecosystem operating in the valley was foiled. The people of J-K have chosen peace over violence, education over indoctrination, jobs over dependency and dignity over despair.

The young generation deserves a future free of fear and that is the future we are building together under the leadership of PM Modi," he said.

He said peace must be anchored in opportunity.

"A society that trusts its institutions becomes resilient against fear. A family that receives services without discrimination becomes a stakeholder in peace and progress.

"A youth empowered with education and employment is empowered to fight separatism and terrorism. Justice for terror victims is moving with speed and sincerity because it is a national obligation," the LG said.

He said no grievance is being ignored and no family will be left invisible. Justice delayed has caused enough suffering. Now justice to the terror victim families is timely, humane, responsive and consistent, he added. (PTI)

Three held, 384 rolls of banned Chinese manjha seized in Delhi



NEW DELHI, Aug 5: Three people have been apprehended and 384 rolls of banned Chinese manjha seized in separate operations across Delhi as police intensified crackdown on the illegal sale of the hazardous kite string, officers said on Wednesday.

A team of the outer district police arrested a man and seized 300 rolls of banned Chinese manjha from his possession and a storage facility, they said.

The police said they received a tip-off on Tuesday about the illegal sale of the prohibited kite string at Nilothi Extension. Acting on the tip-off, a police team laid a trap

and apprehended the accused, identified as Rahul, after seizing a roll of the banned kite string from him.

During questioning, the accused allegedly disclosed that he had stocked a large quantity of Chinese Manjha at a building in Nilothi Extension. A subsequent search led to the seizure of 299 more rolls, taking the total seizure to 300 rolls.

An FIR was registered and further investigation launched in the matter.

In another set of operations, teams of the northeast district police apprehended two persons and seized 84 rolls of banned Chinese

manjha.

At Jyoti Nagar, the police raided a shop in Ashok Nagar following specific information and found 80 rolls of the banned string. The shop owner, identified as Rishab Jain (24), was arrested. During interrogation, he disclosed the alleged source of the consignment, and efforts were on to trace the supplier, the police said.

In a separate raid, Nand Nagri police seized four rolls of banned Chinese manjha from a shop and held the shop owner, Amir Khan (32). People traditionally fly kites in north India in the run-up to Independence Day.

Delhi Police in a social media post said, "Making, selling, keeping, buying, or flying kites with Chinese manjha is completely prohibited. Using Chinese manjha is a punishable offense under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.

Violators may face up to 5 years of imprisonment, a fine of up to Rs 1 lakh, or both. If anyone sees selling, buying, or using Chinese manjha anywhere — report it immediately to their nearest police station." (PTI)

JK: Kathua SSP calls for intensified vigil, patrolling ahead of I-day celebrations

JAMMU, Aug 5: Police in Jammu and Kashmir's Kathua on Wednesday stepped up security ahead of Independence Day celebrations and the ongoing annual Amarnath Yatra, with SSP Mohita Sharma directing intensified patrolling, surprise checks and strategic deployment of Quick Reaction Teams (QRTs), officials said.

Sharma chaired a security review meeting, which was focused on ensuring seamless coordination among all stakeholders for the safe and peaceful conduct of the national event and the pilgrimage.

The SSP directed all concerned agencies to intensify patrolling, conduct surprise naka checks and maintain a robust security grid, with QRTs strategically positioned for prompt response to any emergency or security threat.

The meeting also reviewed law and order management, traffic regulation, crowd management, security of vital installations, highway domination and area domination around the Independence Day venue, besides hotel checking and verification of tenants and outside labourers. (PTI)

Gateman's action prima facie cause of Murshidabad train-van collision that killed 5: Vaishnav

NEW DELHI, Aug 5: The primary cause of a collision between a school van and the Nimita-Katwa passenger train was a gateman opening the level crossing gate for road traffic when the train was approaching, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav told the Lok Sabha on Wednesday.

The incident occurred on July 17, 2026, at a manned level crossing in West Bengal's Murshidabad district, in which five persons were killed, and four others sustained injuries.

DMK MP TM Selvaganapathy asked the railway minister about the collision and also sought to know whether accidents at level crossings had increased in recent years.

In a written reply, Vaishnav said that the collision involving a school van and Train No 53054 DN Nimita-Katwa Passenger happened at approximately 6.40 am on July 17, 2026, at Manned Level Crossing (MLC) Gate No 24A/2 along the Azimganj-Katwa section of the Howrah Division of Eastern Railway.

Providing details, he stated that at about 6.41 am on July 17, 2026,



on the Azimganj-Katwa section, which is a double-line route, the train travelling towards Katwa on the down line reached Manned Level Crossing No 24A/2, situated between Khagrahat Road and Karna Subarna stations, and collided with a Tata Sumo that was crossing the railway tracks.

"While the train was passing, the level crossing gate was supposed to be closed, but it was in open condition. Just before this train, 13431 UP Nabadwip Express (going towards Azimganj on UP line) passed this level crossing at

about 6:39 am with the level crossing gate in closed condition," he said.

"However, the gate was opened by the gateman after this train passed before allowing 53054 DN Nimita-Katwa Passenger train, which was about to arrive," Vaishnav stated.

"Prima Facie cause of the accident was opening of gate after passing of UP train no 13431 Nabadwip - Belurghat Express without passing 53054 DN Nimita-Katwa Passenger," the railway minister further added. (PTI)

No voter deletion in SIR over missing 2002 electoral roll information: Delhi CEO

NEW DELHI, Aug 5: The office of the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) of Delhi clarified on Wednesday that no voter's name will be automatically deleted during the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) because their name was not listed in the voter rolls from the previous SIR conducted in 2002.

The only reasons for exclusion from the draft electoral rolls are failure to submit completed enumeration forms by the deadline of August 17 or not being eligible to vote, it said in a post on X.

The draft electoral rolls for Delhi, following door-to-door voter verification and the digitisation of enumeration forms, will be published on August 24.

This clarification came in response to senior AAP leader Somnath Bhatti's concerns that he could not find his name on the 2002 voter list, despite having graduated from IIT in 1997 and studying law in Delhi.

Bhatti had expressed worries about rumours that the names of 20 to 30 lakh voters could be removed in Delhi.

The CEO's office added that if a voter cannot find their name in the last SIR, they can provide the details of their relatives, such as their parents or grandparents, both paternal

and maternal.

Additionally, if any voter is unable to locate their relatives' names in the 2002 SIR, they can submit enumeration forms with the details they have to the Booth Level Officers (BLOs) for digitisation, and "his/her name will appear in the draft roll", it said.

After the draft rolls are published, poll officials will issue notices to such voters between August 24 and September 23.

Upon receiving the notice, voters who could not locate their details in the 2002 SIR will need to present the necessary documents to the Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) so that their names remain on the final electoral rolls, scheduled for publication on October 27, the CEO office said.

The voter list from the last SIR held in 2002 has been uploaded to the CEO Delhi website. Individuals can search for details from the last SIR using options like "search by details," "search by EPIC Number," or "Polling Station" available on the portal.

Individuals who moved to Delhi from other states and registered as voters after 2002 will need to provide details from the last SIR (2002/2003/2005) conducted in their respective states. (PTI)

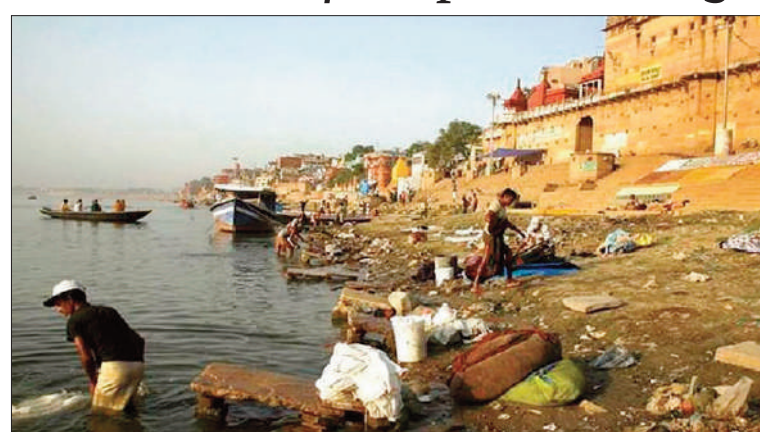
NGT directs Bihar Pollution Control Board to penalise local bodies for polluting river Ganga

NEW DELHI, Aug 5: The National Green Tribunal has directed the Bihar State Pollution Control Board (BSPCB) to impose environmental compensation on urban local bodies for discharging untreated sewage into the river Ganga through stormwater drains.

The green body is hearing a matter where it had taken suo motu (on its own) cognisance of a newspaper report titled 'Ganga water unsafe even for bathing, says Bihar govt report on river pollution'.

In an order dated August 3, a bench of NGT Chairperson Justice Prakash Shrivastava and expert member Afroz Ahmad said, "The tribunal is examining the issue of high pollution level and presence of the faecal coliform in various rivers including the river Ganga, Son, Kosi, Bagmati in 27 districts across Bihar."

The bench said that the news report based on which this original application (OA) was registered "discloses that all major rivers passing through



Bihar are unsafe even for bathing".

It noted that the state's environment department had filed an affidavit, according to which there are currently 43 Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs) in Bihar, of which 15 are complete and operational, five are under trial, nine are ongoing projects, four are at the tender stage and 10 are at the Detailed Project Report (DPR) stage.

The tribunal directed the department to further provide the details of capacity utilisation of these STPs and progress regarding the under-construction plants. It asked the BSPCB to disclose if the treated water from these STPs is meeting the prescribed norms.

It noted that according to the affidavit, there were 15 untapped drains in Patna discharging around 349 million

litres per day (MLD) in river Ganga, seven drains discharging 50 MLD in Buxar, five drains each discharging 47 MLD in Ara (Bhojpur) and 25 MLD in Jamalpur (Munger) and two drains discharging 23 MLD in Barauni.

Besides, the tribunal noted that there were three untapped drains in Dumraon (Buxar) and six such drains in Barahiya (Lakhisarai).

It said, "As per the above disclosure, a huge quantity of untreated sewage is being discharged from the drains which are stated to be untapped. Many of these drains must be stormwater drains which have been tapped, but a stormwater drain cannot be tapped as a permanent measure."

The NGT said that the department is required to disclose the action which has been taken for creating the sewage network to prevent the discharge of untreated sewage in these stormwater drains and the timeline for completing the said network along with the authority responsible and details of availability of funds. (PTI)

Dance made me more expressive as an actor: Karisma Kapoor



dance style in hit songs such as "Le Gayi", "Sona Kitna Sona Hai", "Main Toh Raste Se Ja Raha Tha", and "Husn Hai Suhana".

"As a dancer, you have to be very expressive. And only if you are very expressive, will you be considered a good dancer. Dancing is

not just a robotic thing, so you have to be very expressive in any sort of dance form.

"So, it helped me in my career, especially for expressions and in songs and in acting," she told PTI in an interview.

While dancing brought her popularity, Karisma credits films such as "Fiza" and "Zubeidaa" for proving her acting range.

"Films like 'Fiza', 'Zubeidaa', 'Shakti' and 'Biwi No. 1' also have been an integral part of my journey. It proved I could do both. They're all pieces of my heart," Kapoor said.

The actor said her passion for dance began in her childhood through formal training in Bharatanatyam, Kathak, and later jazz.

"It was a love of dance that I used to go for the classes. I just loved acting, loved dance and anything artistic and creative," the actor.

Karisma also credited the late legendary choreographer Saroj Khan for shaping her Bollywood dance vocabulary.

"Saroj Khan ji has been my guru. I've been to her dance classes and she would train me. In fact, she would train me in Bollywood dance on 'Tamma Tamma' of Madhuri Dixit and Sanjay Dutt. At that time, she was choreographing that song and she would tell (her team) that, 'This is my new song, and teach her song'," the actor recalled.

Talking about her dance face-off with Madhuri Dixit Nene in the 1997 movie "Dil Toh Pagal Hai", Karisma said it was among the toughest song sequences of her career.

"Any actor can understand the kind of pressure I may have gone through, like I would idolise Madhuri Dixit and then doing a film with her. In the song ('Dance of Envy'), I had to show it was a competitive dance piece.

"It was a bit difficult. It was a mixture of emotions because I was looking up to Madhuri Dixit and then I had to give her these glaring looks and perform my best," she said.

As a judge on "India's Best Dancer", Karisma said she enjoys watching young talent and added that dance has evolved over the years on reality TV.

The dance show, which premiered on Sony LIV and Sony Entertainment Television in early June, is co-judged by Geeta Kapoor, Terrence Lewis, and Jaaved Jaafari.

The actor said she evaluates contestants on basis of four E's -- entertainment, emotion, expressions and energy.

"The performance has to touch me whether we see a play or a movie or a dance or a singing show, it must touch your heart, you must feel some emotion. I'm the emotional judge and I will judge from my heart, and not only technically," she added. (PTI)

NETFLIX RENEWS ROMANTIC DRAMA 'MUSAFIR CAFE' FOR A SECOND SEASON



Streaming giant Netflix on Wednesday announced that Vikrant Massey, Vedika Pinto and Mahima Makwana-starrer romantic drama "Musafir Cafe" has been renewed for a second season.

The series, which gained popularity soon after its release last month, revolves around the characters of Chander, Sudha and Preeti as they navigate love and life through a series of choices.

The next chapter, the streamer said, will answer some of the questions audiences have been living with after they watched the story.

"Musafir Cafe" has captured the hearts of audiences all over. The conversations about the show have hijacked the Internet with debates about the ending and what lies ahead, the dialogues, the characters and the music. Romance as a genre when done right captures hearts and conversations like no other genre does. We are bullish about building this genre, like we built comedy for our members. And I'm happy to announce Musafir Cafe S02 will be an integral part of that slate. We can't wait to take this tale of love and longing into its next exciting phase," Tanya Bami, Series Head, Netflix India said.

The series creator and writer Sharanya Rajgopal said he is overwhelmed with the outpouring of love for the show.

"As storytellers, we can only hope that our characters will find a home in people's hearts, that the honesty in our work speaks to them. The love that audiences have shown Chander, Sudha and Preeti has been far more beautiful than I could have imagined.

"I'm incredibly grateful to Netflix for believing in this story from the very beginning, championing its emotional honesty, and being true creative partners and my musafirs every step of the way. Their faith in my every crazy request and their willingness to nurture it with me, every step of the way has made it possible for us to tell the next chapter. Season 2 will be our love letter to everyone who made 'Musafir Cafe' their own," Rajgopal said.

Directed by Ruchir Arun and based on the characters from the beloved novel by Divya Prakash Dubey, the series is produced by Terribly Tiny Tales (TTT) and Homemade Stories, and besides the three leads, also features Adil Hussain, Rajeev Siddhartha, Anubha Fatehpuria, Loveleen Mishra and Sadia Siddiqui. (PTI)

Last rites of actor Pradeep Rawat to be held on Wednesday



The last rites of "Lagaan" actor Pradeep Rawat, who died at the age of 74 after a battle with cancer, will take place on Wednesday evening here. Known for his performance in popular Hindi films such as "Sarfaroosh", "Lagaan" and "Ghajini" as well as many south Indian movies and television shows, Rawat passed away at a hospital here on Tuesday.

"He was like Amrith Puri in south film industry and had done more than 400 films. Pradeep had a strong personality. Now we have lost another member of the 'Lagaan Team'," the actor's friend Daya Shankar Pandey told PTI.

Pandey was referring to the death of actors Rajesh Vivek Upadhyay, Shrivallabh Vyas and Javed Khan Amrohi, who all played key roles in the period cricket drama, fronted by Aamir Khan.

Filmmaker Ashoke Pandit shared Rawat's funeral details in a social media post where he also condoleed the actor's death.

"Sad and shocked to know about the demise of our dear friend Pradeep Rawat, a brilliant actor and a wonderful human being due to cancer. A great loss to the industry. My heartfelt condolences to the family and near ones. (sic)

"His mortal remains will be kept for final 'darshan' today from 2.00pm to 4.00pm at Bwing P3 Imperial Heights, Goregaon West. After 4.00pm, he will be taken for the final rites and cremation near the Oshiwara Bridge on SV road, Jogeshwari West," Pandit shared.

Rawat rose to stardom with his portrayal of Ashwatthama in "Mahabharat" and later featured in popular TV shows such as "Tehkikaat", "Chandrakanta" and "Yug". His other Hindi movie credits include "Agneepath", "Meri Jung", "Sarfaroosh", "The Hero: Story of a Spy" and "Chhava".

In south cinema, he was often awarded for his portrayal of villains, most notably in "Sye", "Mangala" and "Nayak". He reprised his negative role in the Hindi remake of Aamir Khan-starrer "Ghajini" after starring in the Tamil version, led by Suriya. (PTI)

'GODZILLA MINUS ZERO' TO WORLD PREMIERE AT THE NEW YORK FILM FESTIVAL

The King of the Monsters is about to hit the Big Apple. Takashi Yamazaki's "Godzilla Minus Zero" will have its world premiere at the 64th New York Film Festival, Film at Lincoln Center announced on Tuesday.

The film, the highly anticipated follow-up to 2023's Oscar-winning "Godzilla Minus One," will roar into Alice Tully Hall on Sept. 26. Yamazaki and members of the cast and crew will be in attendance.

The festival takes place from Sept. 25 through Oct. 12. James Gray's "Paper Tiger" has been announced as the opening film. Tony Gilroy's "Behemoth!" as the centerpiece, and Ava DuVernay's documentary "14th" will be the festival's closing film.

"Godzilla Minus Zero" picks up in 1949, two years after "Godzilla Minus One," and continues the story of the Shikishima family as they face an all-new calamity. Something tells us the chaos will involve a scaly, fire-

breathing beast and a boatload of property damage. "Godzilla Minus Zero" is a GKIDS release.

"It is truly an honor to introduce our film to a global audience for the first time in a place of such history and prestige," said Yamazaki. "I am filled with both awe and excitement to see how far the power of Japan's Godzilla can terrify audiences around the world, and whether they will resonate with what lies beyond that fear."

"More than 70 years after the first Godzilla movie, Takashi Yamazaki continues to prove that there's life in the old franchise yet, returning to its postwar roots to locate a haunting, primal terror," said Dennis Lim, NYFF artistic director. "Like its predecessor, 'Godzilla Minus Zero' is a throwback blockbuster, a showcase for human drama and innovative craft, and we are excited to have its world premiere as this year's NYFF Spotlight Gala."

(Agencies)

Exam paper leaks a burning issue, need to examine reasons: Rajya Sabha MP V Vijayendra Prasad

Describing exam paper leaks as a "burning issue" in the country, Rajya Sabha MP and noted screenwriter V Vijayendra Prasad says there should be a technology-driven system under which question papers are generated and encrypted just minutes before the start of an examination to minimise the possibility of such leaks.

Prasad, best known for writing blockbusters such as "Baahubali", "RRR" and "Bajrangi Bhaijaan", said the gap between preparing question papers and conducting examinations creates multiple opportunities for leaks.

"Right now, this is a burning issue in the country. We need to examine the reasons behind paper leaks because there is a time gap between the preparation of the question paper and the examination itself. A leak can happen at any stage -- where the paper is composed, printed, bound, stored or transported. How can it be stopped, or at least minimised? The absolute minimum is to avoid preparing the final question paper before students enter the examination centre," he told PTI in an interview. The issue of examination paper leaks came into focus following allegations of irregularities in this year's NEET examination, which triggered nationwide protests led by the satirical digital outfit Cockroach Janta Party (CJP).

The agitation, which began at Delhi's Jantar Mantar before spreading to several cities, continued for 36 days and culminated with the resignation

of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan after the government accepted the protesters' key demands. Talking about NEET exam, Prasad proposed creating a large question bank for every subject, from which a computer would randomly generate a question paper shortly before the examination.

"Take the recent NEET examination as an example. It has four subjects -- Botany, Zoology, Chemistry and Physics -- with around 45 questions in each. What I suggest is that academicians create a question bank of around 5,000 to 6,000 questions for each subject," he said.

According to Prasad, the question bank should be designed to maintain a predetermined mix of easy, medium and difficult questions, as well as sections testing analytical thinking, memory, recall and creativity. He said the examination paper should be generated through a computer programme shortly before the exam begins, after which experts would verify that it meets the prescribed parameters.

"Once the question bank is ready, the examination authorities will ask the computer to pick the required number of questions from it and generate the question paper within the prescribed parameters. Again, what I want to underline is that they are not evaluating the questions themselves at that stage. They will only check whether the required proportions are equally represented. One or two people will evaluate the generated question paper." (PTI)



Remo Fernandes bids farewell to live concerts with emotional UK performance

Musician Remo Fernandes has announced his retirement from live performances citing recent health struggles during an emotional concert in the UK, which he said would mark his final stage act.

Before beginning his hour-long performance on Monday, the 73-year-old explained why he has decided to retire from live performances.

"Now sitting down and performing is not really my cup of tea. So that's why I decided to call it a day and to stop performing," Fernandes told the crowd at Cranford Community College in Hounslow.

"Some years ago, after I took the third COVID vaccine, I suffered a light stroke. And that stroke gave me some problems in the use of my fingers. So that made my guitar playing and my flute playing a bit difficult.

And it was not as it used to be before.

And then last year, I suffered from vertigo. I had a nasty fall for which I had to be operated on in my cranium."

Fernandes said his doctor told him that he can't perform while standing and that's when he decided to end his journey as a live performer.

He said there were two reasons why he decided to perform for one final time at the UK-Goan Festival.

"I was supposed to perform here last year but I could not perform because of my operation. And the president of the Goan UK, Mr Ravi Vaz, was kind enough to invite me again this year. And this year, I didn't want to say no, I could not say no. So here I am," he said.

The second reason was that he had long wanted to perform in front of Goans in the UK for a long time.

"Finally, my wish has come true.

And I'm going to be performing for you. And I wish to apologize for the fact that my fingers are not what they used to be, what they used to be. My throat is not what it used to be. And I have to sit down and perform," he said. For the next hour, Fernandes took the audience on a trip down memory lane by performing all the songs that made him a pop sensation -- from "Maria Pitache" to "Humma Humma".

Fernandes is best known for blending Goan, Portuguese, rock, pop, Latin, reggae and world music influences into a distinctive sound.

Born on May 8, 1953, in Goa, Fernandes studied architecture at Sir J J College of Architecture in Mumbai before choosing music as a full-time career.

He rose to prominence in the 1980s, long before India's independent music

scene became mainstream.

His English-language albums such as his debut "Pack That Smack" (1986) and "Bombay City" established him as one of India's leading rock musicians, while songs like "Bombay City", "Mr Minister" and "Down with Brown" became cult classics.

Fernandes achieved nationwide fame with playback hits including "Humma Humma" ("Bombay"), "Huiya Ho" ("Khamoshi: The Musical"), "Pyar To Hona Hi Tha", "O Meri Munnii", and "Signal".

Over the years, he has performed alongside or shared stages with internationally renowned musicians, including members of Queen and Led Zeppelin, and has toured extensively across India and abroad.

Apart from music, he has acted in films such as "Ek Villain", "Bombay Velvet" and "99 Songs". (PTI)



Top FIFA officials Wenger and Grafström distance themselves from Infantino's WC sell-off plan

GENEVA, Aug 5: Two senior FIFA executives — coaching great Arsène Wenger and CEO-like secretary general Mattias Grafström — distanced themselves Tuesday from their boss Gianni Infantino's failed plan to sell stakes in future World Cup profits to private investors.

Wenger said in a statement he knew nothing of the \$20 billion plan and that it was "absolutely necessary" to drop the proposal, and Grafström sent an email to all FIFA staff — seen by The Associated Press — calling the last week a "sad and reproachable series of events." He also said it created "turmoil which is difficult to comprehend and accept."

Neither directly named Infantino or offered support for the now-embattled president.

Late Tuesday, media reports in Britain said Infantino would hold a crisis meeting with senior FIFA staff in Morocco on Wednesday, which the governing body hadn't confirmed.

The comments by Wenger and Grafström had

echoes of the direct criticism from FIFA chief operating officer Kevin Lamour, who said Friday that staff had been "deceived" by Infantino's private equity plan, which provoked a furor in global soccer. Lamour called it the "project of one person" and said FIFA staff "deserve better than contempt and intimidation."

The three executives are respected and trusted figures among the 211 FIFA member federations who now hold sway over Infantino's grip on a presidency that looked unshakable after the World Cup ended barely two weeks ago.

UEFA legal threat to FIFA

Wenger, Grafström and Lamour also were named in a letter from UEFA's lawyers to Infantino among 18 executives whose data and communications should be retained as potential evidence.

"You do not need to worry," Grafström wrote Tuesday to the hundreds of FIFA staff based mostly in Zurich and Coral Gables, Florida. "I as-



sure you that you as members of the administration, you will be defended and safeguarded from the political context we currently experience."

Wenger, who was hired by Infantino in 2019 and is FIFA's Chief of Global Football Development, said he was "not involved in this strategic plan and first became aware of the project through media reports."

Infantino withdrew his \$20 billion proposal early Saturday after a furious backlash by global

soccer officials, including European body UEFA warning of a boycott of all FIFA games and events.

The plan would have created a subsidiary — known as FIFA Forward Enterprise (FFE) — to run the money-making parts of the not-for-profit soccer body's work: organizing tournaments like the World Cup, selling broadcasting and sponsorship rights, tickets and hospitality.

It proposed raising \$4.2 billion from investors by selling stakes amounting to about 20% in FFE, based on an equity valuation of \$20 billion. The "anchor investor" would have been Thrive Eternal, launched by Joshua Kushner, whose brother Jared Kushner is a son-in-law of U.S. President Donald Trump.

"The decision to withdraw the project was absolutely necessary and beyond question, because I firmly believe in an independent FIFA that serves our game with commitment, transparency, and integrity," Wenger wrote.

Cash offers to FIFA members

FIFA's 211 member federations — already effective owners of the governing body as a non-profit association under Swiss law — were offered \$20 million each. The deadline to accept was Sept. 19.

They also were promised a doubling of their FIFA funding for the four years through 2030 to \$20 million instead of the previously announced \$10 million.

Infantino shared details of the project to FIFA management just one week after the July 19 final of the financially successful World Cup in North America that drove FIFA's revenues to \$15 billion for the 2023-26 commercial cycle — almost double the income tied to the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

Grafström, a long-time loyal aide to Infantino since their work together at UEFA, urged FIFA staff to "all continue being proud and happy" about the first 48-team World Cup. (AP)

Pakistan takes control on Day 3 of the 2nd cricket test against West Indies

PORT OF SPAIN (TRINIDAD), Aug 5: West Indies led Pakistan by 60 runs with only four second-innings wickets in hand Tuesday after a dramatic third day of the second cricket test played out on a turning pitch.

First, Abdullah Shafique 's unbeaten 160 guided Pakistan past West Indies' first innings of 344, then Jomel Warrican took 6-112 to bowl out Pakistan for 387 and limit the lead to 43 runs.

An opening partnership of 40 between Tagarine Chanderpaul (17) and Kaveem Hodge (34) almost erased the lead before Sajid Khan took 4-32 and Ali Usman 2-29 to reduce West Indies to 103-6 at stumps, putting Pakistan in control.

Sajid first took the wickets of Chanderpaul and Amir Jangoo (13) before a stubborn partnership between Shai Hope and captain Roston Chase took West Indies to 99-3, giving it hope of reaching stumps with wickets in hand.

That all changed in the last five overs when Sajid trapped Hope lbw for 15 and Jayden Seales in the same manner for a two-ball duck. Finally, Chase (17) fell to the last ball of the day, losing concentration and providing Usman with a simple return catch.

Pakistan now has the opportunity to wrap up the match Wednesday, to achieve its first test win



away from home since 2023.

Day 3 also saw Pakistan captain Babar Azam denied his first test century in four years when he was run out for 88 to end a 183-run partnership with Shafique.

Pakistan was still 63 runs behind

pushed the ball into the off side. Shafique first supported the call for a run, then sent Babar back as King swooped on the ball.

Babar tried to turn, retreat and dive for the crease but was beaten by King's flat throw that hit the stumps at the striker's end. The Pakistan captain lay prostrate for some time then rose slowly and left the ground with every sign of dejection.

His last test century came in December 2022 against New Zealand at Karachi and his 88 Tuesday was his highest score in 35 test innings since that match.

To add to the drama, King picked up a lower back injury and had to be taken off after he fell awkwardly after his throw to run out Babar. It is not yet clear whether he will bat on Day 4.

Earlier, left-arm spinner Warrican was splendid with both the old ball and the second new ball, bowling Awaiz Zafar for 1.

Shamar Joseph then trapped Salman Ali Agha lbw and Warrican, with the new ball, claimed his third wicket of the innings when he bowled Mohammad Rizwan for 18. Warrican then wrapped up the Pakistan tail with three wickets in four balls.

West Indies leads the two-match series after a 90-run victory in the first test. (AP)

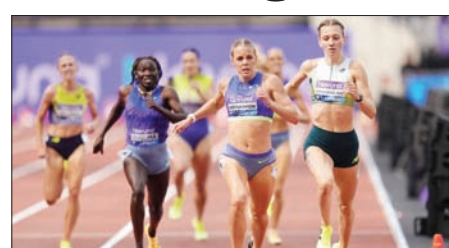
Top performers at European track and field championships to each get 50,000 euro bonus

BIRMINGHAM, Aug 5: Ten track-and-field athletes with the best performances at next week's European championships will each receive a bonus of 50,000 euros (\$58,000), the continent's governing body for athletics has confirmed.

European Athletics said its "gold crown initiative," launched at the 2024 edition in Rome, will reward athletes across five groups of events in Birmingham for both men and women.

The men's and women's groups of events are: sprints and hurdles; middle and long distance; throws; jumps; road, combined events and relays.

A bonus — and gold crown — will go to the athlete in each group of events who "achieves the highest scoring performance in their respective finals using World Athletics scoring tables," European Athletics said.



Olympic champion pole vaulter Armand "Mondo" Duplantis of Sweden was among the inaugural recipients.

The 500,000 euros in performance bonuses matches the total from 2024 with the goal of "attracting the best athletes and creating the best possible event for fans, sponsors and broadcasters alike," European Athletics said.

It's part of a wider push to financially reward

elite athletes.

Track and field became the first sport to pay prize money at the Olympics when World Athletics paid \$50,000 to gold medalists at the 2024 Paris Games. It was a symbolic break with the amateur past of the Olympics.

In June, the International Olympic Committee pledged to pay up to \$140 million to athletes through the 2028 Los Angeles Summer Games by creating a fund for \$10,000 grants — not prize money officially — for which they can apply after competing.

In September, World Athletics will stage a new global championships with \$150,000 prizes for gold medalists. The first Ultimate Championships will be hosted in Budapest from Sept. 11-13, showcasing Olympic, world and Diamond League champions over three evening sessions. (AP)

Theegala and Rai ready for Wyndham Championship ahead of play-offs



GREENSBORO (USA), Aug 5: Indian-origin golfers Sahithi Theegala and Aaron Rai will play the final regular season event, the Wyndham Championship beginning here Thursday, while Akshay Bhatia and Sudarshan Yellamaraju have chosen to take rest before the play-offs.

All four are in the Top-70 and set for the three-event play-offs. The Top-70 play the first event and the field is cut to 50 for the next and finally 30 for the Tour Championship.

Theegala, who stands six feet three inches, is in the midst of a major resurgence in the 2026 PGA Tour season and has fully rebounded from an injury-plagued 2025 campaign that had caused him to miss the FedExCup Playoffs for the first time. The 28-year-old Indian-American has worked hard on regaining his fitness and is once again enjoying the game. While working on his comeback, he is also getting married soon, so it is an added incentive to do well.

This week at Wyndham, Theegala is being joined by the PGA Champion Aaron Rai, who is 35th on the FedEx Cup rankings. Rai is eight places above Theegala.

Rai, the 2024 Wyndham Championship winner, became the first British golfer to win the Major, the PGA Championship, in more than 100 years. He has been widely seen as one of the nicest ever golfers in the game. Married to an India professional, Gaurika, Rai is now ready to make a place for himself in the history books after having become the first Indian-origin player to win a Major.

Theegala's key finishes include top-10 performances at The American Express (8th), the Farmers Insurance Open (7th), the Arnold Palmer Invitational (6th), and the Texas Children's Houston Open (10th). He also delivered a standout T11 performance at the U.S. Open at Shinnecock Hills. Rai is grouped with Tom Kim and J.T. Poston from tee 10, while Theegala is grouped from tee 1 with the new sensation Jackson Koivun and Hideki Matsuyama.

Of the big names that are at risk of missing the Play-offs, there is the new star, the 21-year-old Jackson Koivun. It's a testament to Koivun that he's even in contention to make the playoffs with only four pro starts under his belt. Koivun fast-tracked his progression by out-duelling Scottie Scheffler at the 3M Open and holds the last spot in the FedExCup Play-offs with a week to play.

Sandwiched on either side of his win, Koivun finished T10 at the ISCO Championship and T31 at the Rocket Classic. He will be kicking himself for a pair of late bogeys at Detroit Golf Club that knocked him out of a tie for 20th.

Had he held his position, Koivun would have earned an additional 17 FedExCup points and valuable breathing room. Now, he holds only a 12-point advantage over No. 71 Mac Meissner, who could surpass Koivun with a solo 44th finish.

Also on the brink is Keegan Bradley, one of the veterans trying to avoid missing the FedExCup Play-offs for the first time in his career. He sits just outside the bubble with one of the easier pathways in, needing at minimum a two-way tie for 38th to move inside the top-70 threshold. (PTI)

The CWG assessment: Some concerns but positives too for SAI, Ministry



NEW DELHI, Aug 5: It threw up challenges, both sporting and administrative, validated major plans but also highlighted the need to course correct in few aspects. The just-concluded Commonwealth Games was akin to a mid-term exam for the Sports Authority of India (SAI).

The nodal body under the Sports Ministry that is responsible for conducting national camps, overseeing selection, and monitoring the training and competition calendar of athletes, is celebrating the "more than expected" medal count of 39, which includes 13 gold and 17 silver medals.

At the same time, its push for greater support to swimming and cycling got a reality check at the Games thanks to medal-less and underwhelming show.

In addition, logistical issues such as boxers and judo players not receiving their baggage on time after arriving in Glasgow have been noted as administrative concerns to be addressed going forward.

"The brightest aspect of this tally is the judo performance (two gold, one silver and one bronze). Yes, swimming and cycling remain work in progress and it is still time before we become truly competitive. Boxing is another positive. You might say the competition shrunk this time but that's not our fault. We fight whoever is in front of us," acknowledged a senior SAI official in a conversation with PTI.

"In weightlifting we should have got may be two gold medals instead of one (Mirabai Chanu)."

India participated in 12 judo events in Glasgow and won four medals — two gold, one silver and one bronze, compared to three medals, minus any gold, in 2022. This was despite the fact that a couple of judokas had to be withdrawn due to anti-doping offences prior to the team's departure.

The boxing contingent topped the medal tally with a haul of 10 medals, including seven gold and three silver.

"There are some administrative issues as well. Some course correction is needed on that front, like athletes not receiving their baggage. Perhaps it would be a good idea to

have a points person with the team, specifically instructed to handle these things in future Games.

But overall, the sense of relief is palpable following the fourth-place finish because the final tally ended up being higher than the pre-Games internal estimate of 25.

"It just shows that the efforts directed towards aspects such as build-up training at locations which had conditions similar to Glasgow paid off. For instance long-distance runner Gulveer Singh has been in Colorado, USA almost entirely for the last two years," the official said.

Gulveer became the first Indian to win a 10,000m silver in the Games and also picked up a bronze in the 5000m competition, making him the country's first track athlete with two medals in the same edition of the event.

"Injury management is another area where we feel there has been significant improvement. Tejaswin Shankar is a prime example. His knee issue flared up during the high jump competition, forcing him to retire but he was eventually able to compete in decathlon within a couple of days," said the SAI official, citing his gritty bronze-winning performance in what is considered the most grueling discipline in athletics.

The government's flagship Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) has been central to elite athletes training and preparations. Under the scheme selected athletes' training is funded and they are also provided a monthly stipend to cover their other ex-

penses including nutritional needs.

In the last five years, the TOPS expenditure has stood at Rs 125.44 crore, with the 2024-26 spending amounting to Rs 51.92 crore. These figures were revealed by Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya in response to a query on TOPS a few days ago.

A total of 369 elite athletes, including para-athletes, are being currently supported under TOPS as part of the preparations for the 2028 Olympic Games.

Sports Ministry also pleased

Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya made a presentation before the MPs from the ruling NDA on Wednesday in which he highlighted India's growth.

The truncated Glasgow Games featured only 10 disciplines of which a mere eight were there in the previous two editions as well.

A comparative analysis of the performance showed that India secured a higher gold medal count as well as a higher overall tally this time. The 39 medals achieved this time were significantly more than 30 (2022) and 22 (2018) in the previous two editions.

"The government has put in the efforts in the last decade. And the results are there to be seen," he said on Wednesday.

But up ahead is the Asian Games come September-October in Japan.

It could well be a major reality check for disciplines such as boxing and judo even though shooting, wrestling and badminton would be back in the mix to shore up the numbers on the medals table. (PTI)

Shubhankar, Anirban to spearhead country's challenge in DP World India C'ship

NEW DELHI, Aug 5: Shubhankar Sharma and Anirban Lahiri will spearhead the Indian challenge against a world-class field featuring Major winner Rory McIlroy, and defending champion Tommy Fleetwood among others at the DP World India Championship, to be held at the picturesque Delhi Golf Club from October 15 to 18.

The USD four million tournament is the eighth of nine events in the Back 9 phase of the 2026 Race to Dubai and serves as a key stop on the road to the season-ending DP World Tour Play-offs, culminating in the DP World Tour Championship in Dubai in November.

Sharma and Lahiri will be joined by an elite international field that also includes and reigning Open champion Ryan Fox, Shane Lowry, Justin Rose, European Ryder Cup captain Luke Donald and Ryder Cup star Viktor Hovland.

Sharma, in particular, will be eager to make the most of home advantage. He became the youngest Indian to win on the DP World Tour when he captured the Joburg Open title in December 2017 at the age of 21.

Just two months later, he added the Maybank Championship to his resume and capped off a breakthrough season by winning the 2018 Sir Henry Cotton Rookie of the Year award while also topping the Asian Tour Order of Merit.

Now 30, Sharma has also won six titles on the Professional Golf Tour of India (PGTI) and represented India at the 2024 Paris Olympic Games.

"It was very special to play in the inaugural DP World India Championship at Delhi Golf Club last season, and I'm very much looking forward to returning this October," said Sharma.

"Having such an incredible field coming back to India for the second edition of this tournament says a lot about the continued growth of the game in our country, and it provides a great platform for the many talented Indian players competing at the moment," he added. (PTI)



No practice games for Australia before next year's India Tests: Head coach McDonald

MELBOURNE, Aug 5: Australia head coach Andrew McDonald has revealed that his team will not play any practice match before its high-profile Border Gavaskar Trophy away Test series against India next year as a short preparatory camp in conditions similar to the sub-continent would be more useful.

The much-anticipated five-Test series is scheduled to start on January 21 in Nagpur. "We feel as though we've got enough time to immerse ourselves in those conditions. We won't be taking on a practice game. It'll just be more around the location," McDonald told 'cricket.com.au'.

"We've got a couple of options there. We have gone to the UAE previously and we have also gone into India last time into Bangalore, so we're just working through what that would look like in terms of how we then manage the individuals."

The Australians will, however, play tour games against local sides during upcoming assignments against South Africa and England.

The series against India would last for over a month with games spread across Nagpur, Chennai, Guwahati, and Ranchi before the finale in Ahmedabad.

During their 2023 tour of India, the Aussies had held a camp in Alur near Ben-



galuru to prepare for the series.

"Ultimately, if you can have a dedicated venue that you're able to use and replicate

as close to the conditions that you believe you may get in the first Test match or throughout a Test series, that's ideally what

you want," he said.

"You case those locations - you want a connection in terms of conditions and climate. We believe we'll get that right in terms of where we go, it just hasn't been confirmed yet."

McDonald said players shortlisted for the India series but not in contention for the preceding home rubber against New Zealand would be expected to prepare for the tour instead of playing in the Big Bash at that time.

Matthew Kuhnemann, Todd Murphy, Cooper Connolly, Peter Handscomb and Matthew Renshaw are some of the names in contention to play in India, according to the report.

"A lot of that would happen on the back of the four Tests against New Zealand, seeing where players are at. We'll potentially have some different players with different skill sets that we believe can perform in India, so it won't necessarily be the squad that finishes the Test series (against NZ that then heads to India).

"There'll be some players that we need to put a little bit more prep into, and that'll start in Australia also, balancing out Big Bash commitments and things like that," he said.

Australian have not won a Test series in India since 2004-05 season. (PTI)

CWG gold medalist para athlete Dilip Gavit aims to set world records in 100m & 400m

NEW DELHI, Aug 5: After setting a record en route to winning the 100m gold medal on his Commonwealth Games debut in Glasgow, para athlete Dilip Gavit is aiming even higher -- he now hopes to break world records in both the 100m and 400m events at the upcoming Para Asian Games in Japan.

"I want to set world records in the 100m and 400m at the Asian Games. At the 2022 Asian Games in Hangzhou, I won gold in the 400m. It was my first time competing in the 100m at the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, and I won the gold medal with a Games record," said Gavit, who competes in the T47 category, on the sidelines of a felicitation ceremony organised by Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya to honour para athletes who won medals at the CWG.

"I want to run 10.28 seconds (close to India's able-bodied national record). Earlier, I competed in able-bodied events. I won gold medals at the national level among able-bodied athletes and at the Khelo India Games. Back then, I mainly competed in the 400m," he said.

The T47 category is for athletes with upper limb impairments, including unilateral arm amputation or reduced function in one arm, which can affect balance, coordination and running mechanics.

Gavit felt that the competition at the Asian Games would be much tougher.

"I'll be competing in both the 400m and the 100m. The level of competition will be higher. My coach will prepare me accordingly."

Asked how challenging it was to compete in two different events, Gavit said he enjoyed running both without any pressure.

"I usually compete in the



400m, so running the 100m wasn't difficult for me. I just had to sprint. I wasn't under any pressure because I really enjoy the 100m. I just went out, sprinted and had a lot of fun racing," he said.

Gavit dedicated his gold medal to his personal coach, Vajjanath Kale.

"The day I ran the 100m in Glasgow was Guru Purnima. My coach Kale sir always tells me that no matter what happens, the only goal should be to make India proud. His words stayed in my mind."

"I was determined. I had decided that if I won the gold medal that day, I would dedicate it to my guru," he said.

"In 2016, Kale sir took me under his wing. He kept me at his home, treated me like a family member and gave me all the training and support I needed," he added. Gavit pointed out that he did not require any rest before the Asian Games.

"I've already had enough rest during this period. I don't want to rest. There are more competitions ahead, and I need to be ready for them. That's why training is extremely important."

"Now I'll return and resume training for the 400m. My coach will decide the training accordingly. Training for the 400m automatically helps with the 100m as well, but the main focus will be on the 400m," he said. (PTI)

Last 10 months tested me in ways I never expected: Neeraj Chopra

NEW DELHI, Aug 5: Opening about the fitness issues that he has been battling for close to a year, Indian javelin throw ace Neeraj Chopra said the last 10 months have tested him in ways that he never expected.

The 28-year-old two-time Olympic medalist, who added a Commonwealth Games silver to his crowded cabinet last week, was primarily hampered by an adductor muscle injury and a few other niggles along with it.

His start to the season was delayed but he managed to find his rhythm at the CWG in Glasgow with a season's best of 85.83m.

"There are throws that travel far, and then there are moments that carry the weight of an entire journey. The past 10 months have tested me in ways I never expected," he posted on Instagram on Tuesday alongside a short clip of his CWG performance.

"Recovering from multiple injuries, rebuilding my body, finding my rhythm again, and learning to be patient when all I wanted was to compete. I was training every day without knowing if I will even have a season to compete this year," he revealed.

Chopra, who won gold in the 2018 Games in Gold Coast in Australia with a throw of 86.47m, missed the 2022 edition due to an injury. He sustained a lower back injury just before the World Championships in September last year and he had competed in just one event before the CWG.

At the Games, Chopra was bested by current world leader Rumesh Tharanga Pathiranga of Sri Lanka (89.75m) amid difficult windy conditions. The former world champion expressed his gratitude towards his support staff for helping him make a comeback. (PTI)

Accidental hockey goalkeeper Mohith HS is ready to realise lifelong dream in WC

NEW DELHI, Aug 5: At 24 years of age, accidental goalkeeper Mohith HS of Karnataka is set to realise his lifelong dream of representing India at the FIH Hockey World Cup, which will be jointly hosted by the Netherlands and Belgium from August 15 to 30.

Alongside the experienced Suraj Karkera, Mohith is one of the two goalkeepers in the Indian team, marking another significant milestone in his remarkable journey.

While Mohith may not have the same level of international experience as Suraj, the young custodian has impressed consistently in recent months, particularly during the final leg of the FIH Pro League season, where his performances reinforced the selectors' faith in his abilities.

Ironically, Mohith's hockey



journey began by chance. He was drafted into his school's hockey team because there was no goalkeeper available, and his coach believed his height would be an

advantage between the posts. What started as an unexpected opportunity soon evolved into a promising career. Since then, Mohith has represented India at the

Junior World Cup before earning his senior national call-up, steadily progressing through the ranks.

"I always had a mindset to represent India in major tournaments because when I played in the Junior World Cup, we were not able to finish on the podium; we ended up fourth. So, from that time, it was my dream to do something big for India," Mohith said in a Hockey India release.

Mohith also acknowledged the learnings from legendary goalkeeper PR Sreejesh, who is an inspiration for the next generation of Indian custodians.

"We have learnt a lot from him (Sreejesh). But it's not that we are under pressure to fill those shoes because he has done so well for India. We will give 100 per cent on the ground, and then we will see what happens," said Mohith. (PTI)

Former Pak players like Mohd Irfan stare at ban for playing in unauthorised league: PCB

LAHORE, Aug 5: Some former Pakistani players, including pacer Mohammed Irfan, are facing the prospect of being banned for two years by the Pakistan Cricket Board after participating in an unauthorised tournament called the Asian Legends Cup in Lusaka, Zambia. The PCB has issued a statement making it clear that players, who took part in the unauthorised Asian Legends event, might face disciplinary action including a ban of two years from approved overseas cricket leagues or events.

"Ineligibility for any cricketing, coaching, consultancy, mentoring and/or other assignments with the Pakistan Cricket Board and the Pakistan Super League (PSL) for a period of two years," the statement said.

A number of well known players were named in the Pakistan Panthers squad which appeared in the Asian Legends Cup but a reliable source said some of them pulled out after learning that it was not sanctioned.

Those who opted out included Muhammad Hafeez,

Shoaib Malik, Wahab Riaz, Sohail Tanvir, and Umar Akmal. But the players who appeared in a match on July 31 against the Asian eleven included Imran Nazir, Taufeeq Umar, Muhammad Irfan, Rahat Ali, Yasir Shah, Zahid Mahmood, Hasan Raza, and Ibrar Hussain. Taufeeq has until recently held the batting coach position with the national women's team while others have also been active on the domestic circuit.

The tournament itself was abruptly ended on Tuesday by the organisers. The PCB said it had taken serious notice of the participation of certain former Pakistan cricketers in the 20th Asian Legends League 2026 held in Zambia.

"International Cricket Council (ICC) considers this league as an unsanctioned/disapproved cricket event under the ICC Regulations on the Sanctioning of Events and Player Release and the tournament has not been sanctioned by the Zambia Cricket Union (ZCU) as well," the PCB said. (PTI)

Praggnanandhaa leads after rapid phase at St Louis, blitz next

ST. LOUIS (USA), Aug 5: Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa topped the rapid section of the St. Louis Rapid and blitz, scoring 12 points out of a possible 18 to keep his hopes alive for a place in the Grand Chess Tour (GCT) finals to be held later this year.

The Indian, who is no longer a part of 2026 World Championship, displayed some immaculate technique, precision and the will to win in the rapid section that spanned over nine rounds in this annual edition that is a part of professional chess for several years now.

Praggnanandhaa lost the ninth and final round in the rapid section to Dutch GM Jorden van Foreest but still managed to retain a one-point lead, finishing ahead of Uzbekistan's Javokhir Sindarov, who will challenge D. Gukesh in

the World Championship title showdown later this year.

However, the GCT's last rapid and blitz event is not just based on the rapid section but there are 18 more blitz games to be played before the winner is determined for the USD 200,000 prize pool out of which USD 50,000 goes to the champion.

Had Praggnanandhaa defeated van Foreest, he would have entered the blitz section with a more comfortable lead, a margin that could have proved crucial in his pursuit of the overall title.

Four wins, each worth two points, and four draws helped Praggnanandhaa finish atop the standings with 12 points despite a solitary loss in the final round. With the rapid section behind him, the Indian will now turn his

attention to the 18-game blitz segment, where each win carries one point.

Sindarov is followed by Wesley So of the US on 10 points followed by a pack of four players -- Levon Aronian of United States, Anish Giri of Holland, Cuban-turned-American Leinier Dominguez Perez and Vincent Keymer of Germany -- who all have nine points apiece and will fancy their chances in the faster version of the game.

While Sindarov remains a huge threat being just a point behind Praggnanandhaa, Keymer is the other Grandmaster who can make anyone bite the dust when he is in good form.

The 10-players round-robin will be followed by the Sinquefeld Cup which will be a Classical event. (PTI)

CWG gold medallist Harsh eyes Japan, Georgia training stint ahead of Asian Games

NEW DELHI, Aug 5: Having scripted history by becoming the first Indian male judoka to win a Commonwealth Games gold medal, Harsh Singh has already set his sights on the next challenge.

The reigning champion hopes to train in Japan or Georgia ahead of next month's Asian Games in Aichi-Nagoya, aiming to replicate his success on a much bigger stage.

"I want to go to Japan or Georgia. These two countries are ideal for Indian judokas. Along with Japan, Georgia is one of the strongest nations in judo. Training there will be very beneficial for our future preparation. As we prepare for the next level, if we train under coaches who have achieved Olympic glory, we will be able to accomplish what we are aiming for," Harsh told PTI on the sidelines of a felicitation ceremony for the judokas here.

Harsh said Indian judokas still trail the world's best in technical aspects of the sport, stressing that overseas training -- particularly under elite Japanese coaches -- is crucial to bridge the gap and compete at the highest level.

"I have not approached anyone yet... (but) Japanese coaches are strong in terms of experience and technique. We Indians are strong but we are a little behind in terms of technique. Footwork, and a bit more gripping... if we improve in



these aspects, we will be able to perform better," he said.

The champion in Glasgow candidly admitted that the level of competition at the CWG was significantly lower than what he expects to face at the Asian Games.

"When one compares the Commonwealth Games, with the Asian Games or the Olympics, it's (competition) a little easier to get a medal in judo," he said.

Asked whether he had the belief he would clinch the Commonwealth Games gold and become the first Indian male judoka to do so, Harsh said he had always prepared with the gold medal as his only target, never settling for anything less.

"India has won silver and bronze before. So, I was looking for gold. I was preparing for that. I wanted to win gold. If we practice well and go with a positive mindset, we can win gold," he said. (PTI)

I don't burden myself with expectations, focus on scoring as many runs: Smaran

BENGALURU, Aug 5: At times, a 950-run season can hang around a batter's neck like a millstone but Ravichandran Smaran has not overburdened himself with expectations, and is keen for an encore to remain in the national reckoning.

Smaran was the highest run-getter in the 2025-26 Ranji Trophy season, playing a vital role in Karnataka's march to the final. He will launch his domestic campaign in the Duleep Trophy later this month.

"I don't worry about expectations or burden myself with the thoughts of expectations on me as it is all about scoring as many runs as possible," Smaran told PTI.

"It is all about practicing and training well ahead of a season to be in the right mindset," he added.

But Smaran is keen to begin the new season on the right note, scoring heavily for South Zone in the Duleep Trophy to be played at the BCCI CoE.

"It is an important tournament for me as there will be a lot of eyes on this tournament. Runs scored there matter a lot and if I can have a good run then that will set the tone for me for the rest of the season."

"But my focus is on preparing well and I think the rest will fall in place," he said. (PTI)



But how did Smaran overcome a nearly six-month gap from red ball cricket to prepare for the domestic grind?

The left-hander's last First-Class match was the Ranji Trophy final against Jammu and Kashmir at Hubballi in February.

"Yeah, it's a very important question. It is a significant thing to do as I need to transfer my thoughts and batting from white-ball cricket which I have been playing between

April and May through the IPL.

"So, it's important to move over to red ball cricket and in that aspect the (state) league matches in Karnataka are helping me a lot to slip back into the red ball frame ahead of the season," he said.

The 23-year-old has also been working on his game against spinners, which he feels is an important aspect of batting in domestic cricket.

"One thing about playing in do-

mestic cricket is that you get to play against quality spinners on different surfaces in different parts of the country. You need to have a solid technique to get on top of that challenge.

"So, you need to have different shots like sweep and reverse sweep to unsettle their rhythm, and I am working on them ahead of the season," he said.

While his run in red-ball cricket understandably gets all attention, Smaran is equally proficient in white ball formats.

A strike-rate of 155 in T20s and an average of 50.33 in List A matches showcase his comfort levels. So, how does Smaran balances his game as per the demands of each format?

"Let me make it clear that I would like to represent India in all formats. So, it comes down with practice and preparation I guess. Of course, I need to make that little mental and technical adjustment too."

"In T20s my strike-rate is now 155, and it's all about pushing the boundaries and see how I can get that to 170 or 180 (strike-rate), and that's one goal for the season. But as I said it all depends on my preparations," he noted. (PTI)

Vani shares lead with young stars amateur Ayesha and Riya

HOSUR, Aug 5: Seasoned Vani Kapoor was joined by young and promising golfers amateur Ayesha Gupta and Riya Jadon in shared lead at 4-under 67 after the first round of the Women's pro Golf Tour on Wednesday.

Vani teed off from the first and picked three birdies in her first six holes to get off to a great start. She added further birdies on the 13th and the 15th but dropped a bogey in between on the 14th for a 67 as she was in the last group from the first tee.

Ayesha was bogey free with two birdies on either side of the lovely Clover Greens layout.

Riya, who had five birdies and two bogeys between the 16th and the third in a six-hole run, closed with a birdie on the ninth to join Vani and Ayesha.

Heena Kang had four birdies against one bogey for her 3-under 68 and was sole fourth, while five players led by the experienced Amandeep Drall amateur Priya Kumari, Shagun Narain, Smriti Bhargav and Jasmine Shekar were all tied for fifth place with rounds of 1-under 70 each.

Anvvi Dahhiya and Ketaki Sood shot par each and were tied 10th as 11 players carded par or better on the first day. (PTI)